

**It's About Mair Than Who Uh Kiss:
A Grounded Theory Approach To Sexual Identity
And Identity Development In Adolescence.**

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the degree of Doctorate in

Clinical Psychology at the University of Edinburgh.

August 2005.



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Preface

'Sexuality, I shall argue is a 'fictional unity,' that once did not exist, and at some time in the future may not exist again'

Weeks (2003, p. 6).

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis is all my own.

Ian Connor

August 2005

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following people Kezia Danube (LGBT Youth), Nicky Thornton (Vivid Youth), all of the participants and Matthias Schwannauer (Thesis Supervisor), without your input this thesis would not have been possible.

I'd also like to thank my family, friends the 'qually group' and the Aberdeenies, who supported me on a more personal level; it wasn't so much 'tea and sympathy' as 'alcohol and pull yourself together'.

Special thanks to the Fifer, during the last three years you have kept it real, which I appreciate; less a 'glimmer of light' than a 'beacon of cynicism'. Final thanks, of course to Lo, you may do the wrong sort of psychology but as ever, you have been the one who was there throughout it all, the one to offer the most practical and emotional support, dets rye-t!

Abstract

Adolescence has been noted as a time of considerable stress. The key task of which is the formation of a secure identity and the resolution of conflict between the desire to be an individual and dependence upon the family. In addition to these issues gay and lesbian adolescents face the struggle to accept their sexuality and rationalise it within a society that openly promotes heteronormative values and heterodominance.

In the present study, a grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was employed to explore the experiences of young gay men and lesbians and to form hypotheses regarding the development of gay identity. Twelve participants took part in the current study, participants were recruited from LGBT youth organisations in both Edinburgh and Glasgow. Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews.

The current investigation generated one core category called "social context". This category related to the impact of religion, education, society at large and relationships with others upon the formation and maintenance of gay identity. Four principal categories were also generated. These principal categories were related to the self-acceptance of homosexuality, the disclosure of homosexuality to others and the reactions of others to this disclosure. A fourth principal category discussed issues pertinent in the adolescent's life, which were unrelated to sexuality. These core and main categories were formulated into a Model of Gay Identity Development in Adolescence.

Findings were discussed and the implications of this model in relation to theories of gay identity development, and clinical practice were considered.

1 Introduction

‘There has been considerable debate in the literature over the mental health of young people who are gay or lesbian. Some studies have reported no differences between homosexual and heterosexual individuals, but today there appears to be a growing consensus that there is a serious mental health issue here.’

(Coleman & Hendry, 1999, p. 111).

Psychopathology appears a sequelae of adolescent homosexuality. Mental health difficulties in young gays and lesbians are well documented. D’Augelli (2002) observed that LGBT¹ youth had higher Somatization, Obsessive-Compulsiveness, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Depression and Psychosis scores on the Brief Symptoms Inventory (Derogatis, 1993) than heterosexual peers. Indeed, D’Augelli reported that at some point in their lives, more than half of his sample had been counselled for depression and a quarter of his sample were currently receiving counselling for depression. A number of studies have compared the mental health of LGBT youths to heterosexual peers. LGBT youth were found to be five times more likely to be medicated for depression than their heterosexual peers, they also displayed higher rates of depression, hopelessness and past and present suicidality than heterosexual adolescents (Safren & Heimberg, 1999; Youthnet, 2003).

Several studies have reported significantly high levels of suicidality amongst LGBT youth. Morrison & L’Heureux (2001); Urdy & Chantala (2002) reported that approximately thirty-one per cent of adolescents who had same-sex attractions had reported suicidal ideation, whereas D’Augelli, 2002; Savin-Williams, 1994; Youthnet, 2003 observed an attempted suicide rate, in LGBT youth samples, of approximately thirty per cent.

¹ LGBT is an abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered.

More specific to Scotland, Hutchinson et al. (2003) interviewed ninety-five young gay men in Edinburgh and found reported rates of intentional self-harm to be twenty-eight per cent, while fifty-four per cent of their sample reported that they had seriously considered suicide.

While alarming, little has been done to establish possible reasons why LGBT youth report higher levels of mental illness and suicidality than their heterosexual peers. Kitzinger (1996) has suggested that recent LGBT studies have done little more than reiterate rates of gay and lesbian mental health and speculate about gay lifestyles. The current study will now move to consider the shortcomings of LGBT youth research.

1.1 Methodological Shortcomings of LGBT Youth Research

Many studies investigating psychological issues with an LGBT youth population may be considered to have methodological limitations. These limitations may be a consequence of sampling issues, design flaws or even biased theoretical assumptions, each will be considered in turn.

1.1.1 Biased Theoretical Assumptions

One of the most fundamental arguments related to homosexuality is the essentialist-constructionist debate. In other words, is there a core essence of homosexuality, which makes it a permanent and tangible aspect of that individual, or is homosexuality a social construct, that is, an artificial concept constructed by society as a means to describe a range of same-sex sexual behaviours.

The majority of studies investigating homosexuality in an adolescent population appear to have adopted an essentialist perspective (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; D'Augelli, 2002; Hutchinson et al., 2003; Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001; Safren & Heimberg, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1994; Shaffer et al.,

1995; Urdy & Chantala, 2002; Walcott et al., 2003; Youthnet, 2003). The adoption of an essentialist perspective enables researchers to identify and quantify a measurable essence of homosexuality. However, the assumption that homosexuality may be quantified is biased in two ways. Firstly, it holds the reductionist view that homosexuals are a homogenous group (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Savin-Williams, 2001). Secondly, it excludes the role of the individual's personality factors, history and society in the development and maintenance of homosexual-related phenomena.

The second biased theoretical assumption often evident in LGBT youth studies is the assumption that homosexuality is pathological. Elze has noted that 'Few studies have examined the role of risk factors unrelated to sexual orientation in predicting emotional distress and problem behaviours among gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents' (2002, p. 96).

Reynolds (2001) claimed that the view of homosexuality as pathological is a consequence of the lack of integration of questions pertaining to sexuality into everyday life. Reynolds believed that not accounting for sexuality in basic demographic material served to reinforce the power of 'heteronormativity', that is, the view that heterosexuality is seen as 'normal sexuality' while other forms of sexual expression are abnormal, or deviant. Reynolds went on to assert that a consequence of heteronormativity is that, on the occasions when sexuality becomes a public concern, those sexualities not fitting the norm are engulfed by medical or legal doctrines.

1.1.2 Sampling Problems

Skewed sampling is often evident in LGBT youth studies. Traditionally, LGBT studies have recruited from clinical or criminal populations. This has resulted in an over-representation of vulnerable and psychologically distressed individuals in studies (Coyle, 1991; Savin-Williams, 1994). More recently studies have recruited from gay organisations, gay bars and gay pride marches (D'Augelli, 2002;

Hutchinson et al., 2003; Savin-Williams, 2001). Again, it may be argued that data obtained from participants at these venues may also be biased. Both gay organisations and gay pride may foster an unrealistic sense of gay community and belonging, one that may not persist outside the LGBT organisation or the gay pride rally.

There are major ethical implications in recruiting participants from gay bars. Firstly, alcohol consumption may render the individual incapable of consent. Secondly, alcohol may prevent a representative view being established as it may result in the individual polarising their opinions. Thirdly, it is ethically and legally inappropriate to recruit individuals who are under the age of eighteen years in bars. However, focusing on individuals over the age of eighteen years will result in skewed sampling and data is not likely to represent the whole developmental stage. Finally, as with the other forms of recruitment, the people attending gay bars may not be representative of the diversity of gay men and lesbians, indeed, the population frequenting gay bars tends to over-represent young, 'out', on-scene, middle-class, articulate males (Coyle, 1991; Scottish Executive, 2003a).

1.1.3 Limitations of Experimental Design

'Inherent to research on this population [LGBT youth], there is truly no perfect control group,' (Safren & Heimberg, 1999, p. 865). Yet LGBT groups continue to be compared with heterosexual peers (Anhalt & Morris, 1998; Safren & Heimberg, 1999; Shaffer et al., 1995), with bisexual peers (D'Augelli, 2002; Elze, 2002; Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001; Savin-Williams, 1994), and with ethnic minority youth (Rotheram-Borus et al., 1991; Walcott et al., 2003).

Gay and lesbian youth should not be compared with heterosexual or bisexual youth as the proclivity to engage in socially sanctioned, opposite-sex, sexual behaviour is likely to buffer heterosexual and bisexual youth from some of the feelings of rejection, isolation and stigmatisation associated with same-sex, sexual behaviour.

The comparison of gay and lesbian individuals with ethnic minorities is likely to be a result of both groups being considered marginalised and minority. However, in a parliamentary debate, Patrick Harvie (MSP) noted 'If you're black you never have to tell your mother,' (Scottish Parliament, 2005). In other words, ethnicity and race is something usually obvious from birth, sexuality is not. Secondly, people from ethnic minorities do not usually have to live with the fear of disclosure of their ethnicity. Finally, there is a visibility of ethnic minorities; from a young age the ethnic minority child is likely to be able to identify other people of the same ethnicity. The gay or lesbian child is less likely to be able to identify other gay and lesbian young people, and may consequently feel more isolated.

1.1.4 Insider Research

Harrison (2000) noted that much of the academic work investigating lesbian and gay issues is carried out by researchers who themselves identify as gay or lesbian. Thus, the degree of objectivity of such research must be questioned. Are these researchers, as part of the indigenous population, best placed to conduct objective research unfettered by their past experience and uninfluenced by their own theories of their sexuality?

In short, of course these researchers must be allowed to continue with their endeavours. It is commonplace that researchers are drawn to investigate areas that are of personal interest to them, in this vein gay or lesbian researchers investigating issues with an LGBT youth population makes no exception. However, insider research would be more rigorous if investigators routinely disclosed their statement of interest (Appleton, 1995; Asselin, 2003).

1.1.5 Over-representation of Quantitative Methodologies

The majority of psychological studies conducted with lesbian and gay adolescents employ a quantitative methodology and as such typically verify pre-existing theories.

This is likely a legacy of traditional science adopting a positivist paradigm. A consequence of this is that those studies wishing to be viewed as more robust by policy makers and funders, typically adopt the dominant methodological paradigm espoused by traditional science – quantitative methodology (Scottish Executive, 2003b).

Yet qualitative methodology offers the opportunity for greater exploration of phenomena associated with lesbian and gay identity. It provides the opportunity for a disenfranchised and sometimes invisible group to be heard and also facilitates the development of theories related to the experience of gay and lesbian adolescents.

1.2 The Current Research

From the outset the intention of the current piece of research was not to prove or disprove theories of mental health in sexual minority adolescents, rather, the aim was to gain insight as to the experience of LGBT youth.

‘One of the key issues facing the credibility of contemporary nursing is its relationship with the discipline of medicine. In its endeavour to compete with medical research, nursing has adopted traditional scientific approaches without fully questioning the applicability of those methods,’
(Morgan & Drury, 2003 p. 72).

While the above quote specifically relates to the dominance of medicine over nursing, it could just as easily describe the relationship between clinical psychology and medicine. In its endeavour to be viewed as a legitimate science of behaviour and mental health, clinical psychology has adopted the prevailing research paradigm

espoused by medicine - the positivist paradigm². Yet, the positivist paradigm cannot explain or offer an account of the range of human behaviours, nor can it facilitate in-depth analysis as to how individuals experience those behaviours.

This is particularly true of studies involving LGBT youth. The positivist paradigm has quantified and verified a range of phenomena associated with LGBT experience. Yet it has offered little insight as to how these phenomena have been interpreted and experienced by LGBT individuals (Scottish Executive, 2003a; Scottish Executive, 2003b).

Thus, a primary concern of the current research was the identification and employment of a research methodology that would enable the experience of LGBT youth to be investigated.

These preliminary research aims appealed to a qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodology has the advantage of facilitating the investigation of research questions that cannot be addressed by quantification. In other words, qualitative methodology facilitates the exploration of human realities and psychological phenomena without simplifying the experience; it generates theories rather than tests them.

Qualitative research is naturalistic, it involves the researcher becoming immersed in the social world of participants, thus the researcher is able to understand and interpret the meanings attributed to phenomena within the social world of the participants. By immersing himself in the social world of the participant the researcher becomes an "active participant" in the research process.

² The positivist paradigm is based on the assertion that definitive social knowledge is attainable. A single reality exists separate from anyone's perception of it. Positivism holds that it is not possible to go beyond the objective world given to observation. Therefore all knowledge is contained within the boundaries of science and only those questions answerable from the application of scientific method can be approached.

Data generated from a qualitative study is based upon participants' accounts, experiences and interpretations of their social world. As humans often have shared experiences of their world, these interpretations of the social world are likely to highly resonate with readers.

Qualitative data is usually analysed at two levels, explorative and interpretative. In analysing data at an explorative level, the researcher gains further understanding of the participants' experience and avoids 'fracturing the data', in other words, forcing the data to conform to preconceived notions. The interpretative level of analysis enables the themes that have been extracted from the explorative analysis to be developed into theory.

Qualitative methodology advocates the use of small, but purposive samples, therefore populations are rarely random but recruited as they belong to a particular social group, or have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. The use of small samples facilitates in-depth exploration and the generation of information-rich, data.

In summary, it appears that the majority of recent studies investigating LGBT youth have employed a quantitative methodology. These studies have been concerned with the deductive verification of experimental hypotheses, rather than the inductive generation of theories to account for the experience of sexual minority youth. Further, many of these studies have specifically investigated the mental health of LGBT adolescents, ignoring other factors relevant to the experience of gay and lesbian youth.

To gain greater insight into the experience of young gays and lesbians the current study employed a qualitative methodology. As this encompasses quite a large area

of study, the focus was narrowed to investigate the development and experience of gay³ identity.

Therefore the aims of the present study were to:

- explore the experiences of young gays and lesbians.
- form hypotheses regarding the development of gay identity.

The paper will now move to consider some of the literature relevant to the current study. Relevant literature may be divided into two categories, external factors and intrapsychic factors.

External factors are those factors, outside the individual, which may impact upon the gay individual's sense of self. Intrapsychic factors are those factors internal to the individual that promote a sense of self.

1.3 External Factors

External factors include a range of sociological, philosophical and radical psychological factors that have various functions for the gay individual. They offer a means for describing the nature of homosexuality within a climate of heteronormativity. As such, the gay individual is provided with indication of how his or her sexuality may be viewed by society and how his or her sexual development may conform or differ from that of peers.

³ In this sense gay refers to both gay males and lesbians. Combining these categories is not an attempt to diminish the experience of young lesbians, nor does it imply any superiority of the word 'gay', rather, it refers to the self-identification and use of the word 'gay' by many young lesbians. Henceforth, use of the term gay will refer to lesbians and gay men, unless otherwise stated.

1.3.1 The Nature of Homosexuality

At present the nature of homosexuality is contested between two camps, the essentialists and the social constructionists. Essentialists believe that people have a 'particular nature, both as individuals and as a species, and this nature determines what people can and cannot do (Burr, 1995, p. 20). Therefore, in terms of sexuality, essentialist thought holds that people have a core, fixed sexuality; one is either homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual.

In contrast, social constructionists believe that reality is created by social processes. Thus, for the social constructionist sexuality is no more than a socially mediated category of behavioural expression.

1.3.2 Essentialism and Homosexuality

Troiden suggests the essentialist debate is fuelled by 'the homosexual subculture [which] encourages both lesbians and gay males to perceive the homosexual identity as an "essential" identity, a "state of being" and a "way of life", rather than merely a form of behavior or sexual expression' (1993, p. 208). In a sample of gay men, seventy-eight per cent attributed their homosexuality to being 'born that way' (Bhugra, 1988). In addition, the heterosexual population appears more tolerant and accepting of homosexuality when they believed that gay men and lesbians had no control over their sexuality, that it is biologically determined (Aguero et al., 1984; Ernulf et al., 1989; Schneider & Lewis, 1984; Whitley & Bernard, 1990).

The belief among homosexuals that sexuality is determined by some core "essence" may actually be a protective factor. Believing that sexuality is innate, rather than learned may enable some homosexuals to be more at ease with their sexuality, after all, it is something they couldn't help, they were born that way.

In short, the essentialist view of homosexuality may facilitate self-acceptance and may reduce the potential for prejudice and homophobia. However, essentialism frustrates many homosexual researchers who claim that it is needlessly apologetic and that it promotes heteronormativity, 'homosexuality must be tolerated because "we can't help it"; our sexuality is beyond our control and outside our responsibility. The plea that our homosexuality be excused on the ground of diminished responsibility' (Kitzinger, 1996, p. 153).

1.3.3 Social constructionism

Social constructionism⁴ is an epistemology, which holds that the nature of social life is socially created. Social constructionism describes a subjective, rather than objective reality. It asserts that what individuals perceive and understand as reality is not how that reality exists, rather it is an interpretation of reality based upon our previous learning and our social and historical context. As one's knowledge, social and historical contexts continually change so too must one's interpretations of reality. Thus, reality from a social constructionist perspective is dynamic. Social constructionism asserts six key assumptions:

Social constructionism is considered part of the postmodernist movement. Therefore, it rejects key tenets of modernism. Social constructionism rejects the assumption that the world may be understood in terms of metanarratives or grand theories, it rejects the assumption that a single rational account of the world may be reached, it also rejects the assumption that this objective reality may be investigated and quantified through experimental endeavour. In short, social constructionism rejects the rationalism, positivism, empiricism and the objectivity of modernism. Indeed, Gergen (1985) has proposed that from a social constructionist perspective a

⁴ Burr (1995) has noted that the terms constructionism and constructivism are often used interchangeably in literature. Yet conceptually these terms are quite different. Constructionism relates to the propensity of individuals to socially determine, or construct a concept of their reality. Constructivism refers to the psychological processes by which individuals develop concepts of their reality. Henceforth the term constructionism will be favoured, unless a previous researcher has used the term constructivism.

universal reality cannot be described, rather the role of the social constructionist is to account for how the world appears at particular periods in time.

Social constructionism is pluralistic. That is, it rejects the positivist assumption that there is a single, generalizable and discoverable reality. Rather, social constructionism asserts that multiple realities exist, as individuals have different ways to describe the same phenomena.

Social constructionism rejects realism. In other words, social constructionists assert that one's knowledge is not a direct perception of reality, rather individuals construct their own reality.

The importance of language is a key assumption of social constructionism. 'Language itself provides us with a way of structuring our experience of ourselves and the world' (Burr, 1995, p. 33). Constructionist thought holds that one gives meaning to social phenomena, events and actions by describing them in words. It follows that language and words are then the basis of one's constructions and understanding of the world. The use of language facilitates the sharing of knowledge, the development of shared constructs and shared realities. In this way, constructionism asserts that language is a form of social action.

Finally, social constructionism asserts the cultural and historical specificity of knowledge. Constructionism holds that reality is dynamic and likely to alter slightly as individuals continually reappraise social phenomena. Thus each construction of reality is likely to be culturally and historically distinct from the previous one. In short, social phenomena will mean different things to different people at different times. The present paper will move to consider the effect social constructionist thought has had on sexuality.

1.3.4 The Social Constructionism of Sexuality

Naphy (2004) observed that history and mythology have been littered with examples of same-sex sexual behaviour. Indeed, Naphy suggested that the first tangible evidence of homosexual behaviour could be traced back to the hieroglyphic inscriptions within the tomb of two ancient Egyptian males (2453-2422 BCE).

However, it was not until 1869 that Swiss doctor, Karoly Maria Benkert coined the term "homosexual". The term "homosexual" did not enter the English language until 1897, following publication of the book "*Sexual Inversion*" by British sexologist Havelock Ellis.

Overnight, what had before been an adjective means of describing a form of sexual expression, was turned into a noun and the homosexual was born (Burr, 1995).

'The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him...The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species' (Foucault, 1998, p. 43).

For Foucault, this point marked the conceptualisation of people, rather than their behaviour as homosexual. It also marked the social construction of sexuality not just the construction of homosexuality. Constructs of homosexuality were heralded as deficient, deviant and unnatural, thus the procreative couple, the antithesis of homosexuality, became known as the model of sexuality and their sexual behaviour as the norm. In this way, heteronormativity was established and the promotion of heterosexual norms became the responsibility of every heterosexual household (Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1998; Weeks, 2003).

1.3.5 Homosexuality and Power

Foucault suggested that the social construction of homosexuality was an attempt by “power authorities” to explain sexual behaviour in ‘their’ terms and in doing so control sexual expression. To explain this more comprehensively the current study will reflect briefly on the history of homosexuality.

Early laws did not denigrate the homosexual per se, rather sex became a matter of position, those homosexuals adopting the passive role were condemned as unmanly and animal-like. At this point there was no mention of lesbianism, it was assumed that all females were passive and therefore could not be condemned for adopting a passive role.

‘The most striking feature of the world before the advent of Mosaic Law is how few cultures seem to have any significant ‘moral’ concern about same-sex activities’ (Naphy, 2004, p. 15). The advent of Mosaic Law signalled a change in attitudes towards sexual expression that still exists in today’s Judaeo-Christian-Islamic traditions. Mosaic Law focused on procreative aspects of sexual behaviour, in other words, only procreative vaginal sex was sanctioned. Thus, a range of sexual behaviours including gay sex, lesbian sex, heterosexual sex for pleasure, masturbation, oral and anal sex was condemned.

While, the first condemnation of same-sex sexual behaviour was championed by organised religion. The second condemnation of homosexuality coincided with the social construction of the “homosexual”. ‘If the homosexual was now a species it was amenable to scientific enquiry, just as other species are’ (Foucault, 1998, p 43). Thus, the second condemnation of homosexuality came from the medical establishment. Foucault noted that the homosexual was first explored by medicine and then psychiatry in an attempt to discover what constituted these “frauds against procreation” (p. 30). A spectrum of non-procreative sexual acts, with the

homosexual sodomite at the fore was annexed to mental illness, and homosexuality became pathologised.

The pathologizing of homosexuality warranted the involvement of other power authorities in an attempt to control this deviant sexual form. The legal system became involved, for what was considered the necessary containment and management of this sexual perversion. Economic institutions also became involved, after all homosexuals were not profitable to society, their “economy of pleasure” prevented the birth of a subsequent generation and thus the future economic fortune of the country was placed in jeopardy (Foucault, 1998, p. 26).

Foucault observed that the social construction of homosexuality by power authorities not only repressed discourses on homosexuality but it paradoxically produced them. By constructing homosexuality, power authorities were able to impose control upon discourses associated with it. However, a direct consequence of the subjugation of homosexuality has been the proliferation of discourses about it. It appears that the only way individuals can liberate themselves is by engaging in open, frank discussions regarding that which is controlled. Foucault termed this the “repressive hypothesis.”

1.4 Intrapsychic Factors

Intrapsychic factors describe the ways in which the individual responds internally to the experience of being homosexual and how they adapt to this experience in terms of development, identity formation and individuation.

1.4.1 Adolescence

‘... we like to believe that we know one when we see one, but adolescence is an inherently fuzzy concept. It labels a diversity of young people, and covers a lengthy developmental span.’

(Durkin, 1995, p. 508).

Adolescence is a developmental period unlike any other. A rudimentary conceptualisation of adolescence might be, the period heralding transition from childhood to adulthood. Coleman and Hendry (1999) have questioned whether it is realistic to view adolescence as a single 'transition', as, in some instances, it may last up to eight years.

Puberty and the development of secondary sexual characteristics is often considered the start of adolescence, however, defining the end of adolescence is more difficult. Traditionally, the end of adolescence may have been considered the time at which individuals had a secure job, were financially independent from their parents and therefore able to start their own family. In recent years social changes (e.g., pressure to undertake tertiary education, high unemployment, rising property costs) have resulted in young people becoming financially dependent on their parents for longer periods of time, and in some instances young people may be financially dependent on their parents into their mid-twenties.

Conceptualising adolescence as the transition from childhood to adulthood implies a passive maturational process. On the contrary, adolescence is marked by a significant activity. Physical, psychological, social and cognitive changes take place. Adolescence attempts to equip the individual with the skills necessary to forge a sense of self, to resolve the conflict between attachment to the family and independence from them, and to develop sexual relationships with others (Blos, 1967; Coleman & Hendry, 1999; Erikson, 1968).

1.4.2 The Task of Adolescence

'The young person is engaged in a process in which making sense of the social world, and finding a comfortable place in it, is the key to psychological maturation' (Coleman & Hendry, 1999, p. 52). Thus, for Coleman & Hendry the essential task of adolescence is the development of self-concept, or self-identity.

This sentiment may be observed in other psychological theories of adolescence. In psychoanalytic terms, Blos (1967) viewed adolescence as the “second individuation process”. A period characterised by the breaking of family ties and dependence. The second individuation process is facilitated by the maturation of the ego, which promotes a ‘sense of self, different from that of parents, not overwhelmed by internalized superego demands, and more capable of self-support,’ (Kroger, 1989, p. 53).

Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) ‘Ecological Systems Theory’ places the adolescent at the centre of a number of interacting systems. Each level exerts influences upon the individual. Successful adolescents are those that manage to negotiate a sense of self at each level of the system, from forging an identity with friends and family at the microsystem level, to maintaining a sense of self over time, at the chronosystem level.

Thus, identity development is a fundamental feature of many theories of adolescence, however two key questions remain, what is identity and how does it develop?

1.4.3 Identity

‘Erikson (1968) described identity as involving a subjective feeling of self-sameness and continuity over time. In different places and in different social situations, one still has a sense of being the same person. In addition, others recognise this continuity of character and respond accordingly to the person “they know.” Thus, identity for the holder as well as the beholder ensures a reasonably predictable sense of continuity and social order across multiple contexts.’

Kroeger (2000, p. 8).

According to Erikson, key features of identity are the individual’s sense of “I”, and the continuity of identity over time and in different social contexts. While the individual’s identity appears to remain static, identity is never static. The identity

individuals perceive as "I" is embedded within the totality of life experience, and as life is dynamic, one's sense of "I" must inevitably change to meet the demands of new social challenges and changes in the individual's psychology and biology.

In addition, Erikson (1968) believed that identity was the product of three interacting elements, the individual's biological characteristics, the individual's psychological needs and the social climate in which the individual lived. Erikson's vision of these three interacting elements may be considered somewhat innovative as biopsychosocial models were not championed at this point.

1.4.4 Identity Development

Erikson (1968) believed that life involved the successful negotiation of a series of stages, the successful completion of one stage enabled the individual to proceed to the next stage of identity development. Erikson suggested that the adolescent stage of identity formation began as child-like "identifications" come to an end. The young child forms a sense of identity based upon identifications with caregivers. In this way the young child gains security from the knowledge that he is similar to the people he loves. At the beginning of adolescence the individual begins to deny this over-identification with loved ones and favours an independent and unique identity.

Erikson suggested that the task of adolescence was to secure identity and overcome identity confusion, hence the name of the stage, "Identity vs. Identity Confusion". Successful completion of this stage would enable the adolescent to begin to view himself as more of a unique individual and enable him to integrate his various childhood and adolescent roles into one identity. At this stage the adolescent must also overcome "identity diffusion", which is often associated with "identity crisis."⁵

⁵ Kroger (2000) has noted that "identity crisis" does not imply that the adolescent is about to face a catastrophe, rather, the adolescent is approaching a turning point in their identity development. An identity crisis often acts a catalyst and spurs the adolescent to secure his identity.

Erikson believed that there were four elements to identity diffusion. Firstly, the “fear of intimacy”, during which the adolescent fears that intimate relationships or the commitment to a relationship may diminish his own identity. Secondly, the “diffusion of time” may cause the adolescent to have difficulty understanding time perspectives or planning for the future. Thirdly, the “diffusion of industry” results in the adolescent having difficulty focusing on work or study. Finally, Erikson suggested that some adolescents face “negative identity”. The concept of negative identity is one in which the adolescent adopts an identity exactly opposite that which his parents favour. All four elements of the identity diffusion need not be present in an identity crisis.

Erikson’s theory has been criticised for a number of reasons. It was based on his work with boys and therefore may not take into account the developmental trajectory of girls (Bingham & Stryker, 1995). Erikson’s descriptions of the developmental stages has been criticised as being unclear and imprecise. It is argued that the descriptions do not give the reader a definite sense of the phenomena occurring at each stage (Kroger, 1989). Finally Erikson has been criticised for his polarised view of each stage. The individual must either successfully resolve each stage or fail it. This neglects to take into account the varying degrees of success each individual will have during each of the stages (Kroger, 1989).

Marcia (1966;1980) developed Erikson’s theory and proposed that there are four stages of adolescent identity development. The first stage is “**Identity Diffusion**”, during this stage the individual has not yet experienced a crisis of identity, nor does the individual have any awareness of the need to secure his identity.

The individual has still not yet experienced an identity crisis during the second stage of “**Identity Foreclosure**,” yet s/he is aware of the need to secure identity and is motivated to do so. During the foreclosure stage the individual is amenable to the advice and suggestions of others, especially parents.

The third stage is “**Moratorium**,” which is characterised by the individual leaving decisions about identity in abeyance. The individual is not completely passive during this stage, rather, s/he is afforded the opportunity to experiment with a number of identity choices, however, the individual will not consciously commit to a secure identity during this stage.

The final of Marcia’s stages is “**Identity Achievement**.” Identity achievement is the point at which the individual has successfully explored and searched various identities, considered options and alternatives and made a commitment to securing an identity. In short, the individual has resolved an identity crisis and has committed to an identity.

Marcia’s theory is important as it does not assume that the adolescent moves passively from one stage to the next, developing insight on the way, nor does Marcia’s theory suggest that the adolescent is involved in the active pursuit of identity resolution. Rather, Marcia believed that the adolescent’s search for a secure identity was both an active and passive process. The stages of **identity foreclosure** and **identity achievement** are characterised as active periods, during which the adolescent is committed to identity resolution. In contrast, the periods of **identity diffusion** and **moratorium** appear less active, these periods afford the adolescent time to experiment and reflect. Marcia’s theory sits well with observations of adolescents. Adolescents are not always engaged in an active search but do have periods of reflection, time to make sense of their world. Indeed, Erikson (1968) has noted that adolescence is a period during which there is a marked increase in introspection.

Adolescent transitions are not, in themselves stressful; these transitions become more stressful when the individual is faced with the concurrent resolution of more than one issue, or when other stresses exist in the adolescent’s life (Coleman, 1974; Colten & Gore, 1991). Authors have suggested that adolescence is a particularly stressful time

for gay youth (Savin-Williams, 1996; Sullivan, 1984). Like other adolescents, the gay adolescent must forge a positive, secure and coherent personal identity, yet the gay adolescent must do this while being acutely aware that his same-sex attractions are condemned by others and may lead to social sanctions.

‘Sexual development is a central strand of all adolescent experience’ (Coleman & Hendry, 1999, p. 98). Sullivan (1984) has suggested that heteronormative values result in sexual identity development of gay adolescents being different from sexual identity development in heterosexual adolescents. Indeed, Sullivan goes on to suggest that gay identity is acquired in a step-like process over an extended period.

1.4.5 The Development of Gay Identity

Bidwell (1988) suggests that there are three aspects to sexual identity, core morphological identity, gender role behaviour and sexual partner orientation. **Core morphological identity** refers to the basic inner conviction that one is either male or female. Core morphological identity need not correspond to the biological sex of birth. **Gender role behaviour** refers to culturally sanctioned expressions of masculinity and femininity, in other words, the expectations and norms for each biological sex; boys should play with trucks and girls with dolls. According to Bidwell, the third aspect of sexual identity is **sexual partner orientation**, that is same-sex, or opposite-sex sexual attractions.

Shively & De Cecco (1993) prefer a bipolar view of sexual partner orientation. They suggest that the individual has both physical preferences and affectional preferences, in other words, the gender the individual is attracted to for sexual encounters need not be the same gender preferred for more emotional and affectional expressions of behaviour.

The present paper shall move to consider various psychological theories of gay identity development.

1.4.6 Psychoanalytic theories of the Development of Gay Identity

Freud (1924) claimed that homosexuality was determined during the Oedipus complex. Children who later identify as heterosexual fantasise about making love with their mother during the Oedipus complex. In doing this, the child takes the place of his father and is therefore able to identify with his father, prompting separation from his mother. In contrast, the child who later identifies as homosexual fantasises about taking the place of the mother and having the father make love to him.

Freud's original conception of homosexuality was formulated for male homosexuals only. At that time society was not widely aware of female homosexuality, as it was the considered normal for two women to show affection to each other, or even to live together.

Malyon (1982) proposed that there were two distinct phases to the development of gay identity. The primary phase saw the individual taking on board heteronormative values. To avoid social rejection the individual over-identifies with peers, accepts an anti-homosexual stance and avoids homosexual encounters. A consequence of this is an increase in intrapsychic conflict, which eventually builds to a level that the individual can no longer tolerate, thus the individual is propelled into the secondary phase. During the secondary phase the individual wrestles and eventually resolves some of his or her inner conflicts, this facilitates an integration of homosexual desires and small-scale disclosure of homosexual status. The individual then latently returns to the primary phase and engages in sexual experimentation and identification with a homosexual peer group.

1.4.7 Social Theories of the Development of Gay Identity

The "Negotiated Identity Model" determines the social implications of assuming a gay identity (Waldner-Haugrud & Magruder, 1996). The model proposes that the expression, and therefore consolidation of homosexual identity is likely to be judged

by the individual in terms of its social costs. The authors suggested that all aspects of the individuals social network are considered; family, friends, peers, colleagues, school, religion etc. If the individual perceived that the expression of gay identity would be too costly to their social life, they would refrain from doing so. If, on the other hand, the expression of gay identity was not perceived to be too costly the individual would express and assimilate their gay identity.

Social learning theory focuses on homosexual development as a result of the situation specificity of behaviour. People are gay or straight because they are taught to be that way. Social learning theories suggest that homosexual identities are adopted as a consequence of the individual not feeling able to live up to society's expectations of masculinity or femininity (Kardiner, 1963). Other social learning factors thought to be implicated in the development of homosexuality were, early positive homosexual experiences, and conversely, negative heterosexual experiences (Gagnon & Simon, 1973), and sex segregation, for example, single-sex schools, prisons, or a shortage of eligible opposite-sex partners were also thought to contribute to homosexuality (O'Kelly & Carney, 1986).

1.4.8 Stage Theories of Gay Identity Development

Troiden (1993) observed five features that stage models of homosexual identity development share in common. Models are situated within a heteronormative perspective. The individual has a gradual realisation of homosexuality, likewise the acceptance of homosexuality is also gradual. Once individuals have accepted their homosexuality they are likely to seek out friendships and sexual relationships with other homosexuals. Finally, once comfortable in engaging with the homosexual subculture the individual is likely to disclose his or her sexuality to increasing amounts of people.

Cass (1984) proposed a six-stage model to account for homosexual identity formation. Stage one known as "**identity confusion**," finds the individual aware that

some of his or her behaviours may be perceived to be homosexual, this stage is signalled by the individual becoming increasingly more confused between the previously held heterosexual identity and burgeoning homosexual identity.

During the second stage, “**identity comparison**,” the gay individual faces a dilemma. The gay individual becomes aware of differences between self and heterosexual peers but s/he is also aware that in disclosing homosexuality s/he may face rejection and alienation, therefore at this point, gay individuals suppress their homosexual identity.

The third stage, “**identity tolerance**,” is characterised by gay individual tolerating, rather than accepting their gay identity. The individual actively seeks out the company of other homosexuals, however, this is often done secretly. The individual has not accepted his or her homosexual identity, therefore s/he cannot risk others discovering it.

“**Identity acceptance**” marks the fourth stage. Positive views of homosexuality are developed as a consequence of increased contact with the gay community. During this stage the individual may lead two lives, to all intents and purposes the individual is gay but s/he retains heterosexual identity when in non-homosexual environments.

The fifth stage is “**identity pride**,” during this stage individuals develop a sense of pride in their homosexual identity, they become loyal to homosexuals and develop polarised opinions, admiring homosexuals and being suspicious and negative towards heterosexuals. At this point the individual may begin to routinely disclose his or her sexuality, although this may be done in an attempt to provoke debate with a heterosexual person.

The final stage, “**identity synthesis**” is characterised by a more balanced outlook, the individual comfortably mixes with both heterosexuals and other homosexuals and no longer expresses polarised opinions. The individual no longer views sexuality as the totality of his or her identity, rather, the individual is keen to express sexuality as merely a feature of identity. During this stage, if the individual has not already embarked upon a long-term relationship, s/he is keen to do so.

Cass (1984) stated that ‘indistinction between the stages is most obvious between Stages 1 and 2 and between Stages 5 and 6, suggesting that identity formation may involve four stages instead of the proposed six’ (p. 163). Troiden (1993) proposed a four stage model of gay identity development.

Troiden’s first stage is that of “**sensitization**,” which he claims begins before puberty. At this time the child has an unfounded feeling that s/he is different from same-sex peers. These feelings may also be accompanied by feelings of rejection and alienation.

The second stage, “**identity confusion**” occurs during adolescence. Troiden suggests that during this stage the adolescent begins to personalise earlier feelings of “differentness” to homosexuality. However, the adolescent may not be in a position to act upon these feelings and identity development may enter a state of suspension, similar to Marcia’s (1966; 1980) “moratorium” stage. Once the adolescent is better equipped to cope with homosexual feelings s/he typically adopts one or more of the following strategies: denial, repair, avoidance, redefinition or acceptance.

The third of Troiden’s stages is that of “**identity assumption**.” The identity assumption stage takes place during late adolescence and early adulthood and is characterised by the individual integrating homosexuality as part of his or her self-identity. At this point the homosexual is likely to begin to socialise with other homosexual peers, embark on homosexual relationships and disclose their sexuality

to others, but not necessarily to heterosexual others. Troiden observed that early homosexual contacts were vital to the development of gay identity, negative early contacts may result in the suppression of homosexual identity in favour of heterosexual identity.

The final stage of Troiden's model is that of "**commitment**," during which, the individual accepts homosexuality as a way of life, the individual finalises the integration of homosexuality with self-identity, yet homosexuality remains one of many features of the individuals self-identity, providing the individual with the resources to operate in many social environments, homosexual and otherwise.

Troiden noted that one essential difference between his stage theory and those of others was the way the individual progressed through the stages. Most stage models proposed that the individual follow a linear path moving to the next stage of development upon the successful completion of the previous stage. In contrast, Troiden likens progression through his model to that of a horizontal spiral, suggesting that progress may occur in many different ways, in some instances individuals may return to a previous stage before completing the current, or may miss out a stage altogether.

1.5 Theoretical Position of the Current Author

It is the view of the current author that sexuality is socially constructed. He believes that there is no essential quality that determines sexuality or homosexuality, rather, the current author believes Foucaultian notions that sexuality is a social construct contrived by 'power' authorities (the church, state and latterly medicine) as a means to subjugate a range of sexual activities that were not economically viable, in other words, those sexual activities that do not lead to birth (Foucault, 1998; Harrison, 2000; Sullivan, 2003; Weeks, 2003).

1.6 Research Diary

'Beginning with the premise that subjectivity is inevitable, this paper argues that researchers should systematically seek out their subjectivity, not retrospectively when the data have been collected and the analysis is complete, but while the research is actively in progress. The purpose of doing so is to enable researchers to be aware of how their subjectivity may be shaping their enquiry and their outcomes.'
(Peshkin, 1988, p. 17).

Acknowledgement of the relationship between the researcher and participants is particularly important as the objective of the researcher is to gain understanding of what participants' view as *real*, inevitably this may only be achieved upon clear discrimination of what researchers hold to be true from that which participants present as truth.

A strong feature of qualitative methodology is the use of subjective research diaries to clearly discriminate the researchers' opinion from the narrative of the participants. Within the current study a research diary was set-up and maintained throughout the course of the research. At the end of the research process the research diary was analysed and themes identified.

The main theme to emerge from the research diary regarding the start of the research project was titled 'why am I doing this?' This theme combined my personal justifications for conducting this piece of research,

"Thought⁶ to myself today, why am I doing this? It took me a while to come to any decision. I suppose my biggest worry is that I am doing research in this area to come to terms with my own experiences. I don't think this is why I'm doing it, I'm pretty much OK with everything... Was thinking back to when I made the decision to do

⁶ Text from the research journal will be presented in *italics*, this is to clearly distinguish the researcher's narrative from that of the participants, which will be presented in normal text.

this, it was during the child and adolescent teaching block and I was still pissed off that there had been no mention of the development of sexuality. Only 1 hour of gay issues, throughout the whole of training!...so many of my friends have said that their childhood was shit, surely clin. psychs. can prevent other children having a shit time..."
(01/04/05)

and my fears at how this research may be interpreted,

"The [peer support] group suggested that I could research this area without producing a militantly gay thesis. My intention is not to produce a study that will be used to further the gay cause. I'm not interested in that, well I sort of am, I just want to do a bit of research in an area I'm interested in and that might help me to make a wee bit of a difference."
(26/02/05)

Elements of the research diary will be used throughout the current study in an attempt to reduce researcher bias, increase transparency and aid the reader in their understanding of the research context.

2 Methodology

2.1 Design

The current study employed a qualitative research design. A number of different qualitative methods may have been used as the basis of analysis. Narrative methods would have facilitated both the exploration of adolescents' sense of identity and sense of gay identity. Discursive methods provide an ideal forum for the analysis of data collected from a social constructionist perspective. Discursive methods also facilitate the analysis of data generated from a feminist or emancipatory perspective; data generated from these perspectives generally relates to individuals who have been discriminated against or who live on the 'fringes' of society. However, the current researcher wanted to extract the main themes from the data and develop these into hypotheses, therefore Interpretative Thematic methods appeared to be the most appropriate qualitative method.

The two most common forms of Interpretative Thematic analyses are Grounded Theory and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). There are two reasons why grounded theory was chosen in preference to IPA as the qualitative method for the current study (Dallos & Vetere, 2005). Firstly, grounded theory facilitated the development of a middle-range theory, which would contribute to an under-researched area of human psychological experience. In contrast IPA offers the development of a more local theory. Secondly, IPA requires the researcher to be interpretative from the beginning of the analysis. Grounded theory, on the other hand, stresses that an interpretative level of analysis only be conducted after an initial, more open level of 'explorative' analysis. Conducting explorative and then interpretative analysis helps the researcher avoid 'fracturing the data', in other words, forcing the data to conform to preconceived notions, this is particularly salient if the researcher and participants share similar backgrounds or have shared similar life experiences. As such grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was adopted as the qualitative methodology.

2.1.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is an inductive method of data collection and analysis. The researcher does not begin with a theory, and aim to test it through the use of experimental hypotheses. Rather guidelines for the collection and analysis of data enable a general, middle-range theory to be developed from the phenomenon under investigation.

The development of the middle-range theory, or 'core concept' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is facilitated in two ways. Data is analysed as it is collected. This method of data collection enables researchers to clarify phenomena, to investigate certain phenomena further and observe differences and similarities between the phenomena presented during one interview with that presented during subsequent interviews. Data collection ends once the point of 'saturation' is reached, in other words, the point at which no new information is found. Development of the core concept is also facilitated by the 'constant comparative method' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method of data analysis proposes that every piece of data should be compared to each other and that data should be compared to emerging categories and theories. This ensures that the core concept is grounded in the data.

Grounded theory was selected as the qualitative methodology to be employed within the current study for four reasons. Like other forms of qualitative enquiry, its inductive nature (Charmaz, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) facilitated the creation of themes and a core concept pertaining to the development of gay identity. Secondly, grounded theory offered a single, systematic and comprehensive methodology, which would guide the research process from conception to the development of a core concept. Thirdly, as the core concept is grounded in the data, it is likely to closely resemble the narratives of the participants and therefore resonate with the readers. Fourthly, grounded theory affords the researcher flexibility during the data collection process, in other words, certain areas may be probed in greater depth, or themes carried into subsequent interviews to offer

greater clarification. In short, grounded theory offers a systematic, flexible, modifiable method of data collection and analysis.

2.1.2 Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003) emerged as a backlash to the positivist assumptions of grounded theory. Grounded theory's assertion that data was 'discovered' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) from theory and that a single, generalizable truth could be established was considered an awkward attempt to apply positivistic and prevailing tenets of traditional science to qualitative studies (Charmaz, 2003).

The 'discovery' of theory was criticised as being positivist as it implied that the theory already existed, it just had to be unearthed by the researcher (Willig, 2001). In contrast a fundamental feature of constructivist grounded theory is the acknowledgement of the relationship between the researcher and participants, and that both parties work collaboratively to generate data.

Constructivist grounded theory asserts that the participants' reality can never be known, it also asserts that each narrative is only one of a number of shared or individual realities. The individual's narrative is not a *pure* expression of their world, rather, it is shaped by a number of contextual factors, social, historical and how the individual believes the recipient will interpret the narrative. In this way constructivist grounded theory is a form of enquiry that closely resembles the real world of participants as it aims to include 'multiple voices, views and visions in the rendering of lived experience' (Charmaz, 2003, p. 275).

While adopting a grounded theory methodology, the current study adheres to Charmaz's (2003) constructivist perspective. The constructivist grounded theory perspective was adopted for two reasons. Firstly, the current researcher believes that

homosexuality is a social construct, constructed by power authorities in an attempt to describe and control people who engage in same-sex sexual behaviours. Secondly, one of the core tenets of the constructivist grounded theory perspective is that multiple realities exist. Homosexuals are not a homogenous group (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Savin-Williams, 2001), many homosexual identities exist: camp, queen, queer, butch, closet, dyke, femme etc., it is therefore likely that there will be multiple realities associated with homosexuality.

2.2 About the Participants

2.2.1 Participants

Twelve participants took part in the current study. The age of participants ranged from fifteen years to twenty-one years. Eight of the participants identified as male and four as female. A brief overview of participant demographics may be found in appendix I.

2.2.2 Inclusion Criteria

A subset of the LGBT population was recruited to reflect the aims of the study; an investigation of the development of gay identity and exploration of the experience of young gays and lesbians. As such, the inclusion criterion of the current study was that participants self-identified as gay or lesbian.

While it is appreciated that bisexual and transgendered youth belong to sexual-minority groups and may share similar developmental experiences with lesbian and gay adolescents, the development of sexual identity in bisexual and transgendered individuals is likely to be different from that of self-identifying gay or lesbian adolescents.

Urdu and Chantala (2002) note that youth who identify as bisexual do not resemble youths who identify as gay or lesbian. While self-identifying bisexual youth may engage in same-sex sexual activities and be rebuked for doing so, their proclivity to engage in socially-endorsed, opposite-sex sexual activities may actually buffer them from some of the stresses faced by other sexual-minority youths.

The term transgender is an umbrella term used to describe individuals who have a conflict between the biology of their sex and the social construction of their gender. Broadly speaking transvestites, drag queens, pre and post-operative transsexuals and hermaphrodites may be grouped as transgendered (Seidman, 1996; Sullivan, 2003). Similar to gay and lesbian adolescents, some transgendered youth may be castigated for engaging in sexual activity with the same biological sex. However, not all transgendered youth have same-sex attractions. For this reason transgendered youth were excluded from the current study.

2.2.3 Sampling

As the author was interested in understanding the experience of a specific group of people (young lesbians and gays), non-probabilistic, purposive sampling techniques were employed.

In addition, snowball sampling was also applied. Snowball sampling refers to a sampling technique in which, a participant is asked if they know someone who fulfils the research inclusion criteria and may be willing to take part in the study (Arber, 1993; King *et al.*, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2003a; Warner *et al.*, 2004). The use of snowball sampling is particularly effective if the population under investigation is small, difficult to access, or if the population is 'mistrustful of being approached by someone they are not familiar with,' (Scottish Executive, 2003a, p. 28).

2.2.4 Recruitment

Participants were recruited from two LGBT Youth organisations in Scotland, LGBT Youth, Edinburgh and Vivid Youth, Glasgow. The current study was concerned with the development of gay identity therefore participants were recruited from LGBT organisations as individuals attending these organisations are likely to have self-identified as gay or lesbian.

The recruitment of participants from more than one source, and therefore city, was considered advantageous, in that greater insight could potentially be gained regarding the experience of gay and lesbian young people in Central Scotland.

2.3 Ethical Issues

Before commencing the study ethical approval was granted by the University of Edinburgh Psychology Ethics Committee. This committee was satisfied as to the experimental design, methodology and validity of the study. While the area of the current investigation is clinical psychology, participants were not recruited from a clinical sample and were therefore judged as healthy volunteers. As such additional ethical approval was unwarranted.

Autonomy, beneficence and justice have been highlighted as the three main ethical issues to be considered prior to undertaking qualitative research (Orb et al., 2001).

2.3.1 Autonomy

Autonomy refers to the informed consent of participants. Participants were not informed that the main objective of the current study was an investigation of the development of gay identity. Rather, participants were informed that the study was investigating the experience of gay and lesbian adolescents. The rationale for this being, the author considered the development of gay identity to be only one aspect of

the experience of gay adolescents. It follows that focusing on this aspect may potentially restrict or exclude the presentation of other phenomena important in the lives of gay adolescents and the development of their identity.

Prior to commencing the research, the researcher met with groups of potential participants at both LGBT organisations. During these meetings the researcher discussed the nature of the research and what participants would be expected to do. In addition, detailed information sheets (Appendix II) were issued. These information sheets provided further information regarding the rationale for the investigation, information about data collection, management and presentation and information regarding the chief investigator and who may be contacted as an independent advisor.

Participants were also issued with consent forms (Appendix II). These consent forms were designed with multiple responses, the reason for this was to force participants to read each of the statements thoroughly before deciding which was the most appropriate response. Participants were afforded a two week cooling-off period between the signing of the consent forms and the interviews, this provided the participants with additional time in which to consider their involvement in the study.

2.3.2 Beneficence

Beneficence refers to qualitative research which helps others and which prevents harm. It is hoped that data generated by this study may be used to gain insight into a developmental phase, which is often overlooked, taking into account important contextual variations.

The current study applied a number of strategies to limit potential harm that may be experienced during participation in the investigation. Prior to beginning interviews the nature of the current study was clarified with participants.

At the beginning of interviews participants were informed as to the limits of confidentiality⁷. The researcher acknowledged that any discussion of developmental issues, or individuals' developmental experiences may raise difficult issues for participants. To limit the potential harm that this might cause, it was reiterated that participation in this study was voluntary, participants may chose to withdraw, or withdraw specific elements of their narrative at any stage. At the end of the interviews the researcher remained in the interview room for a short period of time to allow participants to discuss concerns related to their experience or involvement in the study. In addition, each participant was also issued with a Post Interview Advice Sheet (Appendix II), this sheet provided further information which would be of benefit should the participant be worried about their physical, sexual or mental health.

2.3.3 Justice

Justice, according to Orb et al. (2001) refers to the avoidance of the exploitation of participants. Both LGBT organisations catered for people of all ages. As such, it was anticipated that there was the potential that participants may be under the age of sixteen. It is important to include young people in LGBT research as this avoids retrospective adult accounts of adolescence (Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995), it also empowers a vulnerable and 'invisible' group (Scottish Executive 2003a).

Parental Information Sheets and Parent Consent Forms were issued to potential participants under the age of sixteen. Within the current study sixteen was chosen as the age at which participants could consent to participate, this age is also the age at which individuals can legally engage in sexual activity. As the current study was concerned with aspects of sexual behaviour and attraction it seemed appropriate that this study adopted the same age of consent. Individuals under the age of sixteen

⁷ Participants were informed that any comments they made would be anonymised. They were also informed that the researcher had an ethical obligation to break confidentiality should the participants disclose that they or someone they know was being harmed, or was at risk of being harmed by another person, or if the participant disclosed that they had knowledge of illegal activities.

were also encouraged to discuss their participation in the current study with their parent or guardian.

2.4 Research Context

In qualitative studies it is important to have some information regarding the context in which the research was conducted. This is important to gain further insight into the research project and to limit potential biases (Drapeau, 2002; Harrison, 2000; McCotter, 2001; Peshkin, 1988; Scottish Executive, 2003b; Taylor et al., 1998).

Thus the research context will be discussed in terms of the organisations from which participants were recruited and some background information regarding the researcher will also be provided.

2.4.1 LGBT Organisations - LGBT Youth

LGBT Youth was founded in Edinburgh in 1989. It is a national organisation catering specifically for young people (under the age of twenty-six) who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered.

Originally staffed by a group of volunteers, the organisation now employs twenty-seven staff and has an annual turnover of £0.5 million. While based in Edinburgh, LGBT Youth has developed outreach and satellite projects in three neighbouring areas, Fife, West Lothian and (Scottish) Borders. In addition, LGBT Youth has formed partnerships with five other organisations offering support to Scotland's LGBT young people.

As an organisation, LGBT Youth has adopted the following corporate vision:

- Every LGBT young person will be included in the life of Scotland.

- Every LGBT young person will enjoy a safe and supportive upbringing.
- Every LGBT young person will grow up healthy and happy.
- Every LGBT young person will be able to reach their full potential.

LGBT Youth operates a drop-in support service two evenings weekly. One evening caters for young people under the age of eighteen, the second for those over the age of eighteen. LGBT Youth encourages its members to participate in voluntary work, the philosophy being, those young people experiencing LGBT issues are best placed to offer support, information and encouragement to other LGBT youth, and to offer insight at a strategic level. In addition to offering youth support, LGBT Youth also engages in research, education, training and outreach work.

In 2004 LGBT Youth was one of eight organisations in the UK to be awarded a Philip Lawrence Award for promoting community safety. The organisation received the award for its efforts in tackling isolation, homophobia and bullying experienced by young LGBT Scots.

2.4.2 LGBT Organisations - Vivid Youth

Vivid Youth was established in Glasgow in 2003 after securing funding from Glasgow City Council. LGBT Youth groups had existed in the city before this point, however, their funding had been temporary.

Vivid youth currently employs one full-time youth worker and one full-time sessional worker. Vivid youth works in partnership with LGBT organisations and is involved with the Youth Council.

The group meets once weekly at the LGBT Centre in Glasgow. There is an educational programme in place and recently the programme has tackled issues including, self-esteem and confidence building, assertiveness training and stress management.

The group caters for LGBT identifying young people, from the ages of fifteen to twenty-five. Vivid Youth draws young people from a wide geographical area including, Glasgow City and neighbouring areas such as Ayrshire and Renfrewshire.

Vivid youth adheres to the Vision Statement of Glasgow City Council: Youth services will offer a proactive response to the needs of Glasgow's young people based upon the experience and knowledge of staff, but is committed to continuous improvement of the service and to working in meaningful partnerships with all stakeholders.

2.4.3 About the Researcher

Researchers have long acknowledged the lack of objectivity associated with 'insider research', conducting investigations with populations or groups with which the researcher self identifies (Appleton, 1995; Asselin, 2003; Harrison, 2000; Taylor et al., 1998). Therefore, it is important that the researcher and reader alike are aware of factors that may affect the objectivity of the research.

The researcher is a thirty-year old Irish male, who self-identifies as gay or queer⁸. I believe my sexuality is only one facet of my make-up, and quite often a sub-ordinate facet.

While I do not view myself as militant I see my sexuo-political stance as being one of egalitarianism, I believe that one should not be discriminated against or persecuted because of the gender of the person one chooses to engage in sexual activity with.

⁸ Reynolds (2001, p. 8-9) states 'They [terms to denote sexual orientation] reflect not simply different identities, but different self-identifying languages – for example, homosexual is a term often used by older men and women not attached to contemporary sexual 'communities'...Gay and lesbian are contemporary identifiers for men and women who love the same sex whilst queer or dyke are often used by more political individuals.'

Further, I believe that sexuality is a social construct and that there is no core “essence” of the homosexual.

I grew up in a culture that was not accepting or tolerant of same-sex attractions. Typically those who were thought to be gay were viewed with suspicion or pigeon-holed as effeminate, weird or deviant. I had no contact with people who self-identified as gay throughout my childhood.

I received a denominational education throughout my schooling. This education openly promoted a Christian ethos and I received mandatory religious education until the age of sixteen. My education espoused heterosexuality as normative, indeed, as the only option. I received no formal sexual education, and what peer and familial references there were to homosexuality were often pejorative.

I experienced homophobic bullying from peers, adults and family members on a number of occasions throughout my childhood and adolescence. On no occasion did I report these experiences as I was anxious that it might draw attention to something I was encouraged to feel shameful of.

I am currently accepting of and comfortable with my sexuality. My family and friends are aware of my sexuality and while I do not disclose my sexuality routinely, I do not deny it when questioned. I have a number of gay and straight friends and I have been a volunteer, for approximately seven years, with charitable organisations that offer support for sexual minority individuals and those who are HIV infected and affected. These organisations also promote the equality of LGBT individuals, the empowerment of sexual-minorities and the promotion of safe-sex sexual behaviours.

Currently, I work as a Trainee Clinical Psychologist. My sexuality has impacted on my professional work with three clients who were openly gay or struggling to accept

their sexuality. On two of these occasions it was not appropriate for me to disclose my sexuality.

2.5 Procedure

2.5.1 Pilot Interview

Prior to data collection a pilot interview was conducted. The pilot interview was conducted with three trainee clinical psychologists, some of whom were experienced in data collection for qualitative studies. The pilot enabled the researcher to refine his interviewing technique and take on board constructive comments from researchers more experienced in qualitative interviewing skills.

2.5.2 Data Collection

The interviewer met with potential participants at both LGBT organisations prior to data collection. The purpose of this meeting was to provide an overview of the study and answer any questions potential participants may have had. At the end of this meeting participants were issued with consent forms. Participants were also asked if they knew anyone who fulfilled the inclusion criteria and who may wish to take part in the research study (Arber, 1993; King et al., 2003; Scottish Executive, 2003a; Warner et al., 2004). Participants who were able to identify a potential recruit were given additional copies of the information sheets and consent forms. Once participants had returned completed consent forms they were given a two week cooling-off period, during which they could consider their participation in the current study. At this point only one participant who had completed a consent form decided to withdraw from the study.

Participants were interviewed at the LGBT organisation of which they were a member. Logistically this made sense as some of the participants were young and many did not have access to their own transport. It also afforded participants with a more 'natural' setting in which to recount their experience (Charmaz, 2003).

Participants were contacted and asked to participate in either a single or group interview at a time of their convenience. The group to which participants were assigned depended on their availability for interview.

Data was collected until the point of saturation was met. The interview schedule can be found below.

The interview schedule was as follows:

- Interview 1 – held in Edinburgh. Group interview - two interviewees.
- Interview 2 – held in Edinburgh. Single interview - one interviewee.
- Interview 3 – held in Glasgow, Group interview - four interviewees.
- Interview 4 – held in Glasgow, Single interview - one interviewee.
- Interview 5 – held in Glasgow, Single interview - one interviewee.
- Interview 6 – held in Glasgow, Single interview - one interviewee.
- Interview 7 – held in Edinburgh, Group interview - two interviewees.

At the start of each interview session participants were briefed as to the limits of confidentiality. Anonymity and data management was also discussed. All interviews took place in a private room and were recorded using a digital voice recorder.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. This style of interview enabled specific questions to be posed while providing a degree of flexibility that a rigid, prescriptive interview agenda cannot provide. Consequently, this facilitated the exploration of certain phenomena in greater depth (Gubrium, 1994). All interviewees were asked the following questions:

- How has your sexuality affected your life?
- At the point when you first realised that you may be gay or lesbian, what was happening in your life?

These questions were asked as they orientated participants to the subject matter under investigation and attuned participants to other phenomena they may have been experiencing during the period when they first began to suspect they were gay. In this way the current study did not focus exclusively on issues of sexuality. Glaser (1992) advocates a 'generalist' position to data collection, suggesting that more focused data collection inevitably results in theory verification, rather than inductive data collection.

2.5.3 Data Management

The digital recordings of interviews were transferred to computerised voice files. These voice files were transcribed verbatim. At this point all transcripts were anonymised and digital recording files were deleted.

Interview transcripts were computer analysed using the NVIVO 2.0 package (QSR, 1999-2002).

2.5.4 Data Analysis

In accordance with grounded theory procedures (Charmaz, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) data was analysed using a two-step method.

Data was initially analysed using a method of explorative-coding or line-by-line coding (Appendix VII). This initial level of coding enabled the data to be analysed by defining the actions that have occurred, events recounted or people recalled in each line of narrative. This level of coding is important as it immerses the researcher

in the participants' narrative, increasing the researcher's familiarity with the data, it also limits the extent to which researchers can impose preconceived ideas upon the data. This level of analysis aids the development of themes from the data.

The second level of 'selective' or 'focused' coding is more interpretative.

Transcripts are re-analysed taking into account the themes emerging at the end of the first level of analysis. Focused coding aids the development of a theory as emergent themes may be compared to the data for correctness and appropriateness of fit.

Taken together, both levels of analysis facilitate the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), every piece of data should be compared to each other piece of data, and all data should be compared to emerging categories and theories. The constant comparative method ensures that any theory developed is grounded in the data.

Within the current study pairs of transcripts were subjected to explorative coding in tandem. This enabled subsequent interviews to be used to explore emerging themes or plug gaps in the data. Once saturation had been met data collection was discontinued. Streubert & Carpenter (1995) suggest that the point of saturation is reached 'when no new conceptual information is available to indicate new codes or the expansion of existing ones' (p. 152). Upon completion of explorative coding transcripts were then subjected to focused coding and a core concept developed.

2.6 Ensuring Quality in Qualitative Research

2.6.1 Reliability, Validity and Generalizability

Reliability, Validity and generalizability are recognised as the criteria for establishing experimental rigor in positivist research, yet these criteria do not hold, and are not consistent with research conducted from a social constructionist

paradigm. Indeed, Janesick has noted that researchers have an almost constant obsession with 'the trinity of validity, reliability and generalizability, as if there were no other linguistic representations for questions' (2003, p. 69).

Paradigmatic differences between positivism and constructionism have been highlighted, it therefore appears foolish to judge the rigour of one paradigm based on the evaluative tools of another. In this way researchers have developed criteria appropriate for the evaluation of methodological and analytical rigour in postpositivistic studies. Within a social constructionist paradigm the criteria of experimental rigour is termed 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1997).

2.6.2 Trustworthiness

The degree to which a qualitative study being conducted within a social constructionist paradigm can be considered to be trustworthy is based on upon four assumptions; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

2.6.3 Credibility

Credibility reflects the extent to which research findings accurately represent the views of participants. From a social constructionist perspective credibility is important as it ensures that interpretations and research outcomes are 'approved by the constructors of the multiple realities being studied' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.296).

To ensure credibility within the current research, member checks and triangulation of techniques were applied. Member checks are a vital part of conducting constructionist inquiry, the researcher is attempting to describe phenomena from the viewpoint of participants, it follows that participants alone can legitimately judge the credibility of the findings.

Member checks were carried out at various stages of the research process. Important themes selected from one interview were fed back to participants in subsequent interviews, in this way the accuracy of shared and individual realities could be determined. Member checks were also conducted after completion of data analysis. Conducting member checks at this stage was advantageous as the researcher was able to present a detailed and organised account of participant's narrative and afford participants the opportunity to respond to this account. Four participants agreed to take part in the final member check.

Triangulation of methods refers to the seeking of information from multiple sources, methods and interpretations, 'triangulation as a strategy is based on the idea that different perspectives on the same phenomenon can enhance our understanding' (Dallos & Vetere, 2005, p. 205). Within the current study a number of triangulation techniques were employed. Participants were recruited from multiple sources (LGBT Youth, Edinburgh and Vivid Youth, Glasgow), interviews were conducted at different times and participants were interviewed either singly or as part of a focus group. In employing these triangulation techniques 'an attempt [was made] to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 8).

2.6.4 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts. Within the current study transferability was enhanced by the use of three techniques. Firstly, the research context was explicitly detailed, in doing this readers are aware of the context in which the research was conducted, increasing transparency and enabling findings from this study to be 'transferred' to other similar studies.

Secondly, purposive sampling was employed, in this case, young gay men and lesbians were recruited as the researcher was interested in understanding the developmental experience this group. Purposive sampling enhances transferability

as it limits the possibility that other realities, in this case, heterosexual young people, other sexual minorities or older lesbians and gay men, may interfere with the reality trying to be described.

A final strategy to enhance transferability is the use of thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick descriptions are richly described data that provide the reader with sufficient information necessary to judge the extent to which findings can apply to people in other settings.

2.6.5 Dependability

Dependability relates to the reliability of findings, in other words, the extent to which if the inquiry 'were replicated with the same or similar respondents in the same context, its findings would be repeated' (Erlandson et al. 1993, p. 33).

To enhance dependability an audit trail was developed. The audit trail explicitly detailed the experimental procedure. Further, the researcher's interaction with the data was detailed in the research journal.

In addition, random portions of the data were subjected to inter-rater analysis. The purpose of this was to establish congruence between the researcher's analysis and that of the inter-rater. It also served to prevent fracturing of data, in other words, forcing the data into preconceived categories. On this occasion inter-rater reliability was high.

2.6.6 Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the objectivity of the researcher. Confirmability is important in order to demonstrate that experimental findings have not been unnecessarily influenced by researcher bias.

Within the constructivist grounded theory perspective (Charmaz, 2003) the mutual role both the researcher and participants have in creating a core concept is acknowledged. Therefore, in order to increase confirmability a research journal was maintained.

The current study paid particular attention to researcher biases throughout the research process. In this way discrimination could be made between the researcher's constructs, the participant's constructs and the researcher's construct of the participant's narrative. Once the research question and design had been formulated the researcher made a clear description of his opinions regarding the research and ideas as to what the research might generate. In addition, a subjective research diary was set up. The purpose of which was to provide a forum for the researcher to 'voice' his thoughts, opinions and ideas throughout the research process, especially during the data collection, analysis and theory generation stages. The diary was analysed and compared to participant's narrative, in doing so biases could be identified.

In addition to using the research diary as a forum to note my thoughts regarding the research, I also gained support from five peers, each of whom were conducting research using a qualitative methodology. We regularly met as a group and developed an electronic forum (www.q-ed.co.uk) for the purpose of peer support, the circulation of information and critical analysis.

3 Findings

One core category and four main categories were generated from the current study (Figure 1). The core category was titled “**social context**” and the four main categories titled “**help me, I’m different**”, “**coming out, coming in**”, “**fallout**” and “**normal adolescent life**”.

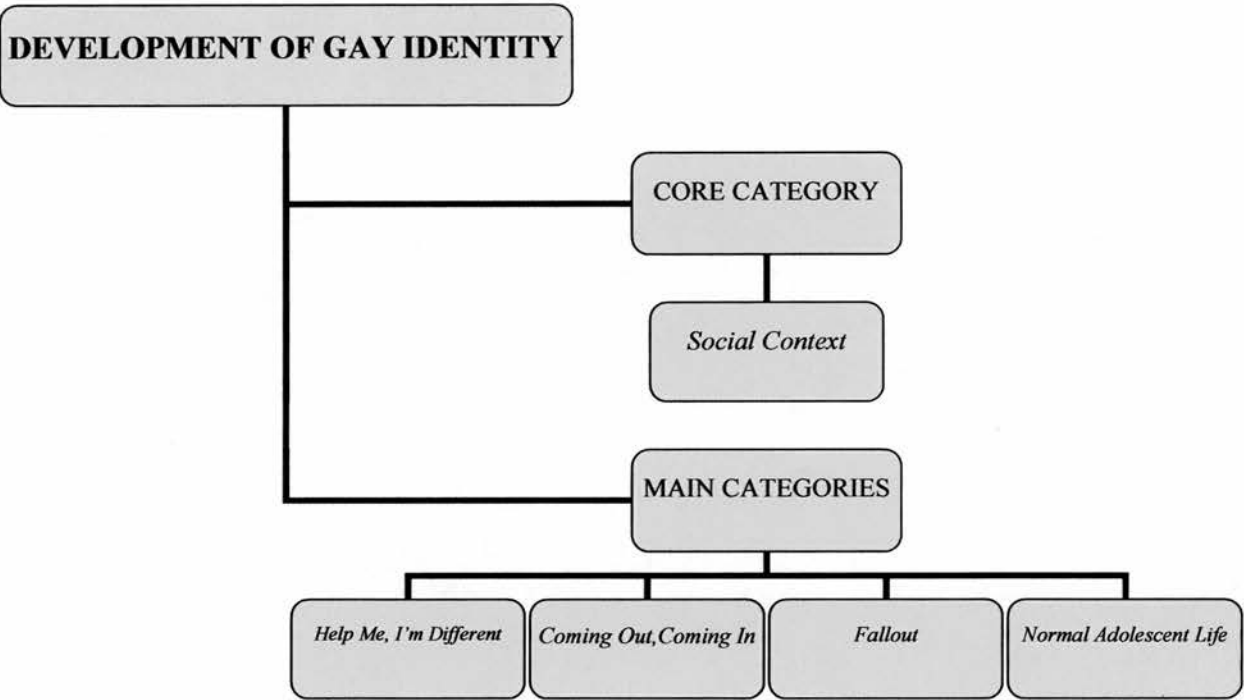


Figure 1: Core category and main categories related to the development of gay identity.

The core category, “**social context**” was related to the impact of religion, education, society at large and relationships with others, upon the formation and maintenance of gay identity. The main category “**help me, I’m different**” related to gay adolescents’ experiences of feeling different from their peers and the realisation that this “differentness” was homosexuality. The second main category “**coming out,**

coming in” represented the process of disclosure of homosexuality and identification with gay others. The third main category **“fallout”** reflected the reactions of others to a disclosure of homosexuality and the psychological consequences for the individual of these reactions. The final main category **“normal adolescent life”** discussed issues of adolescent development unrelated to sexual identity, this category also considered the dreams and ambitions of adolescents.

Before discussing the core and main categories the current paper will move to consider how the categories were generated from the data.

3.1 Generation of Categories

Within a grounded theory approach categories are generated cumulatively. The narrative of one participant is analysed and themes extracted. These themes form the basis of the interview schedule to be carried forth into subsequent interviews. The narratives of subsequent participants determine the importance of a theme and its development into a category. Themes emerging on several occasions would suggest that that phenomena is important for multiple participants, these themes are therefore likely to warrant further analysis and development as a category. In this way, grounded theory involves a clear evolution of themes into categories and these categories may be traced back to individual narratives.

3.1.1 Generation of Core & Main Categories

Within the current study categories and themes did not evolve gradually. From the initial interview participants appeared to take a developmental approach to their sexuality, even though they had not been prompted to do so, nor had they been prompted that one of the research aims was to investigate the development of gay identity (see sections 3.3.1 & 3.5.2).

As such, an organic, process-driven analysis was generated. Indeed, three of the four main categories can be seen to represent developmentally sequential periods in the formation of gay identity. The categories “help me, I’m different”, “coming out, coming in” and “fallout” represent the realisation of sexuality, the disclosure of sexuality and the consequences that may follow a disclosure of homosexuality. In addition, a further main category, “normal adolescent life” and the core category “social context” were also strong themes within the initial and subsequent interviews.

Although the core category and main categories could be identified from the first round of explorative analysis, grounded theory procedure demanded that those themes formed part of the interview schedule for subsequent interviews. In this way, an attempt was made to establish if themes were consistent across participants. While the chief elements of each category were generated at an early stage, lesser elements and themes were seen to fluctuate between interviews.

The ability of participants to focus on the process of gay identity development may be a legacy of their interaction with other gay peers. In interacting with other gay youth, it is likely that these individuals have established criteria against which their own situation could be compared. It follows that some of these peers will be at a more advanced stage of sexual identity development while some remain at an earlier stage. Thus, the sexual minority youth is likely to be acutely aware of the developmental trajectory of sexual identity development and his or her stage within that trajectory. S/he may therefore be ideally positioned to eloquently verbalise such development.

3.2 Architecture of Categories

The core and main categories are each composed of a number of principal categories. Principal categories are subsumed by subcategories, which are composed of themes. A diagrammatic representation of the hierarchy of categories can be found in Figure 2.



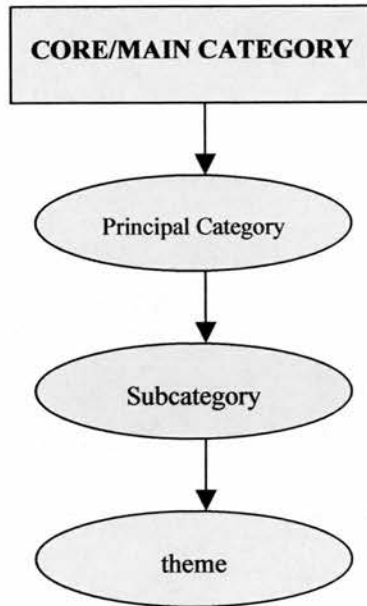


Figure 2: Hierarchy of Categories

3.3 Core Category

The core concept will be discussed in some detail. Throughout this discussion participants' narrative will be used to illustrate themes. In an attempt to validate findings a more discursive analysis shall follow the description of each principal category.

3.3.1 Core Category – Social Context

Social Context was generated as the core category of the current study. The core category Social Context was composed of four principal categories and each of these principal categories was composed of subcategories. An overview of the core category may be found in Figure 3. Each of the four principal categories, society, education, religion and relationships with others will be considered in turn.

3.3.2 Description of principal category – SOCIETY

The category Society reflected the effect that wider society had upon the experiences of the gay adolescents. This category consisted of two subcategories, Multiple Gay Realities and Heterodominance.

MULTIPLE GAY REALITIES

The subcategory Multiple Gay Realities relates to how others view homosexuality, how the gay adolescents view their sexuality and the discrepancy between the two accounts.

“The point of stereotyping is to generalise, do it quickly and to cheat... The problem with it is when you try to use a stereotype to understand a whole group of people, you end up misunderstanding a hell of a lot more people, that’s the problem, so it doesn’t really work”
Participant 4

While stereotypes are seen as a tool of cognitive economy, a consequence is that they are reductionistic, each individual cannot be perceived on an individual basis.

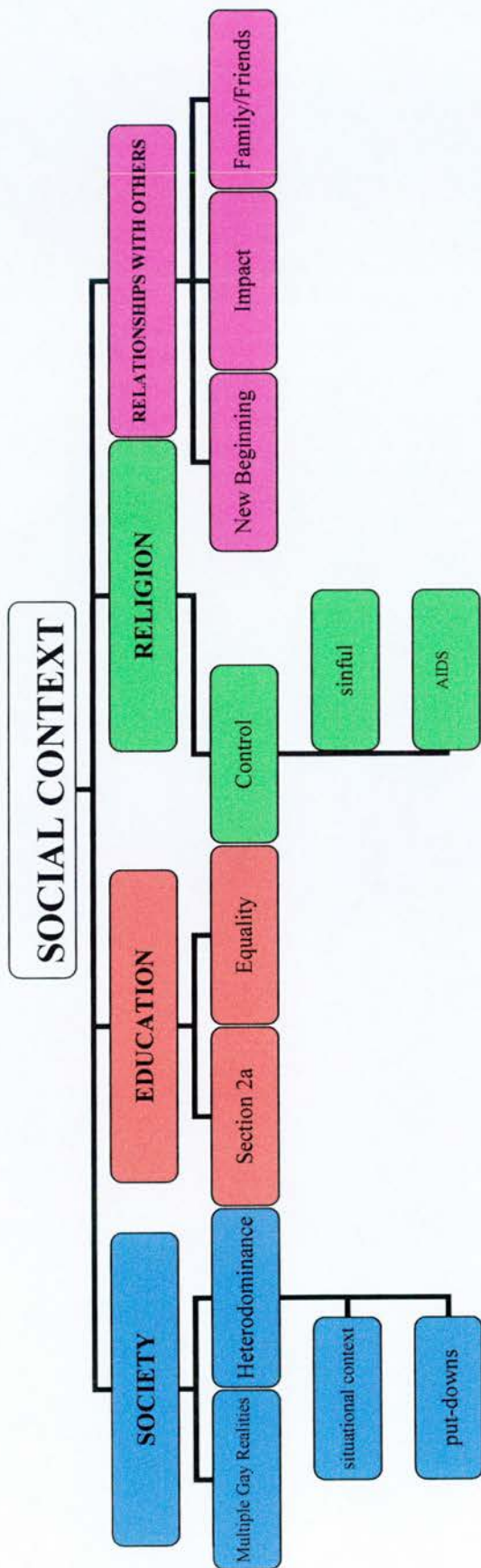


Figure 3: Overview of the core category – Social Context

Female participants observed that lesbians were often stereotyped in one of three ways, typically as the “femme” lesbian, the “butch” lesbian or the “feminist” lesbian.

“Well there are the straight stereotypes of the lipstick lesbian and the butch dyke. You know that there are lipstick people and butch people out there but you also know that most people fit somewhere in the middle”
Participant 11

“I think that a lot of people think that all lesbians are feminists and all feminists are lesbians, so a lot of women think that I’m not a feminist because they think that it’s this big raging separatist thing. I think that it’s a really negative stereotype and that it’s a shame. Feminism is about your mother and your sister, you don’t have to do certain things to be a feminist. I just think that all women who don’t let themselves be treated badly and women who respect other women are feminists”
Participant 12

Participants recognized that heterosexual stereotypes of lesbians appeared to be quite unrealistic and were not appropriate descriptions of the majority of lesbians. In contrast participants viewed themselves as individuals and preferring not to be categorized or judged on the basis of their sexuality.

“I kinda just see myself as me”
Participant 12

“What’s it all about anyway? I’m jist me, you’re jist you”
Participant 7

“I don’t see it like people are something anyway, things can change, depends on the people you meet, I might not always necessarily be gay, I hope I am, but I might not be... it just seems a waste of time to say that I’m a lipstick lesbian or butch dyke”
Participant 11

Male participants were aware that heterosexual stereotypes of gay men tended to focus upon the promiscuous, stylish and camp. Participants felt that this may have been a result of television programmes, which often portray gay men as leading wealthy, hedonistic lifestyles.

“Ma auntie’s fiancé annoys me when ‘e automatically assumes every gay guy disnae want a good relationship and thuir jist wantin cock fun aw the time, and a lot, I think maybe straight people wull think that about gay guys”

Participant 6

“I think that most people in the UK think that the gay scene caters for young, verbal, affluent, good-looking and stylish men. Programmes like “Queer Eye” and “Will & Grace” do little to dispel that myth. But they should come to a gay club on a Saturday night {{interviewee sniggers}}, it’s just not like that, there’s a whole mixture of people”

Participant 3

In stark contrast to heterosexual stereotypes of gay men, the gay participants were keen to impress the normality of their lives.

“I’ve only really had one boyfriend still and I’ve been with him for over a year, so it’s like, I’m not wanting to be promiscuous or anything”

Participant 8

“I hang around with people who go to the cinema, because I like going to the cinema (Int: OK), people that go to the pub, because I like going to the pub, or people that like horror films because I like them, or people that like the same music as me”

Participant 4

One participant was eager to state that stereotypes need not always be pejorative. She believed that fitting the stereotype of a lesbian offered her security and a sense of belonging within the gay community.

“I don’t know, I quite like it, I quite like fitting the stereotypes, in some ways you know, if I’m feeling proud or happy about it, it helps me see that I have a place, you know a place and other people that are similar”
Participant 12

HETERODOMINANCE

The second subcategory is that of Heterodominance. Previously in this paper the term heteronormativity has been used to refer to the view that heterosexuality is seen as ‘normal sexuality’, while other forms of sexual expression are abnormal or deviant. The term heterodominance is superlative to this, not only does it advocate queer subservience but it also idealises the white, Protestant males. In this way heterodominance not only controls sexuality but also exerts influence on gender, religion, social class and ethnicity.

Participants were aware of the effects of heterodominance from an early age.

“I’m not quite sure what I’m going to do. The only thing that I had in my head was a job, a wife, kids that sorta thing. Just kinda what you expected everything to be like, you know in the wee books that you read and everything, you know that they grow up and get married”
Participant 8

For participants, the effect of heterodominance was negative. Two clear themes were formulated from the heterodominance subcategory. Those themes were Situational Contexts and Put-downs. Participants witnessed the effects of heterodominance in a variety of situational contexts; with their family, at work and with friends.

“I kinda said to my mum that I’ve met somebody and she said “well, what’s her name?”
Participant 4

“I walked off the job, obviously it was really, really embarrassing. I went into the agency and they had asked me why I walked out and what actually happened and I sat there for about an hour and I really, really didn’t want to tell my agency boss, ‘cos in Newcastle they just use, they are notoriously sorta like macho and kind of quite rough, you know? They could sack you for no reason basically and I didn’t want to give them any reason for sacking me, so after about an hour of just sitting there and the agency boss telling me that I was going to lose my job, I told them the truth [that the participant had been subjected to homophobic bullying whilst at work] and they said that wasn’t a good enough excuse and sacked me”
Participant 3

“Like if they were talkin about a football game or somethin, I would check the score before I came out for school, ‘cis I know they’re definitely goin to talk about it, like, “did you see this goal?” I just go “yeah,” just so I can fit in”
Participant 10

Thus it appears that heterodominance is pervasive across situations. Indeed, the above quotes might suggest that participants have become resigned to heterodominance and pay lip-service to it.

A further result of heterodominance is the acceptance and ubiquity of gay “put-downs”. Heteronormative values make it easier to recount jokes which have a homophobic subject matter, after all, there are less “gays” than “straights” in the world, therefore if a “queer” joke is told it follows that less people are likely to be offended. Heterodominance also actively encourages the telling of homophobic jokes, as it offers a means to exert superiority and therefore subjugate gay people.

Participants have observed that the meaning of the word “gay” has evolved and for young people its common usage is not to describe an individual who is sexually attracted to the same gender but as a descriptor of weakness or ineptitude.

“Uh’ve noticed that a lotta people say “oh don’t be so gay”, but they don’t mean it as in, ahm . . . {{3 sec}}, homosexual, they mean it as in...

...A lesser form of being heterosexual...

...Aye, lesser form of being masculine and stuff”

Participant 6 & Participant 7

“I’m in the sixth year and the fifth years below us, the word gay is used on a daily basis, for many things... at someone they don’t like, at someone they feel is weaker or inferior, ahm, it’s a general slugging term”

Participant 1

3.3.3 Discussion of principal category – SOCIETY

Discussion of this category involves a discussion of control and power imbalances. The overall feature of the Society category is that of dominance and subordination, as observed in both the Heterodominance subcategory and the Multiple Gay Realities subcategory. Indeed, the relative power of the Heterodominance subcategory may be understood by the way in which gay people are described by heterosexuals.

Bell & Weinberg (1978) asserted that homosexuality as a classification was unnecessarily reductionistic. Rather, these authors proposed that researchers talk about “homosexualities”, as gay people are not a homogenous group but vary from one another in terms of their experience, genetics, social and cultural milieu. Yet, the multiple definitions of gay individuals in society tend to be derogative; the “gender benders”, feminine males and masculine females; hedonistic and promiscuous gay males or the aggressive, unapproachable lesbians.

These pejorative, yet culturally-sanctioned heterosexual stereotypes of gay people serve to reinforce heteronormativity and heterodominance. The “gender benders” are considered unnatural; diluted and weak humans, viewed with suspicion, their purpose to confuse and seduce heterosexuals. The hedonistic and promiscuous gay male considered disease-ridden and ‘out of control’, while the aggressive, unapproachable lesbian may be considered the antithesis of the nurturing female.

The purpose of heterodominance is control and the maintenance of control. In Foucaultian terms heterodominance is an attempt by the controllers of the power authorities to retain control of those authorities by eschewing values that closely describe themselves as the norm. Heterodominance is unspoken but it exists nonetheless. It is filtered through society and adopted by popular culture. Today’s language reflects that. “Gay” is now defined as weakness, for instance the phrase, “you can’t do that because you’re gay” may be used as a “put-down” for unsuccessful individuals. In this way language upholds and promotes heterodominant social descriptions. A consequence of this language is that gay individuals are viewed as weak.

In short, society’s understanding of homosexuality ‘takes place against a backdrop of stigma’ (Troiden, 1993, p. 195). The stigma is maintained by heterodominant authorities who serve to vanquish unknown and unquantifiable sexual expressions in favour of promoting its own values.

Participants within the current study appeared aware of the phenomenon of heterodominance. Many had directly experienced heterodominant language, which served to maintain differences between them and heterosexual others while reinforcing notions of homosexuality as an innate weakness of the individual.

“It just kinda makes you wonder how it will affect people, you know, if you’re told that gay is bad or inferior will that make gay people think they’re bad or inferior”
Participant 10

3.3.4 Description of principal category – EDUCATION

The category of **Education** represented experiences participants have previously encountered, or were currently encountering in the education system. The category of Education was made up of two subcategories, those being Section 2a and Equality.

SECTION 2a

The legacy of Section 2a⁹ was seen by participants to have affected the level of information they were presented, at school, regarding homosexuality.

“I think the only mention of homosexuality at school, was in Religious Studies, when they talked about who the Nazis persecuted”
Participant 12

“Well we had one lesson anyway, so any sex education would have done”
Participant 10

“I think that it [homosexuality] was mentioned really, really briefly in Social and Sex Education, but it was like, it was just like this passing comment and everyone sniggered. But she [the teacher] didn’t go into the gay side of things at all, I guess with Section 28, you’re not allowed to”
Participant 11

⁹ Section 2a (in Scotland), or as known in the rest of Britain, Section 28 was part of the Local Government Act of 1988 and was enacted on 24/05/88. Section 2a stated that local authorities ‘shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality [or] promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship’ (Dept. of Education and Science, 1988). Section 2a was repealed by the Scottish Parliament on 01/06/00.

Participants appeared to believe that the lack of discussion of matters related to homosexuality and the lack of information in schools about homosexuality may have been a potential causative factor in homophobic bullying.

“I think that what would have made a huge difference is information and information in schools, like information given to everyone, so it wasn't really obvious that you were picking up information about gay places or places like this [LGBT Youth]. I think that if everyone had been given that and if they'd been given like more rounded Social Education lessons, that would have reduced ignorance in all bullies”

Participant 12

Participants suggested that gay teachers could offer an important source of support to adolescents who were struggling with their sexuality. However, few participants reported that they were aware of a gay teacher at their school, and felt that unless the teacher had personally disclosed their sexuality that they could not approach them.

“There's a couple of rumours goin about that there's a homosexual teacher in the school as well, but you just can't tell, that may be intrusive to them, if you're goin to ask them, it might not be, it might just be rumours”

Participant 10

“We had a couple of gay teachers, like female teachers that I knew about but it was difficult, everyone knew that they were gay, so if you were seen talking to them you got slagged off and called a lezzie or a poof”

Participant 11

EQUALITY

The second subcategory within the Education category is that of Equality. All participants believed that there should be equal parity between heterosexual sex education and that of other sexualities. They believed that this was important to

“normalise” homosexuality but also to provide information and support for gay adolescents.

“I think that there’s not enough awareness in schools about LGBT people, and maybe if they did find out about it they’d realise that it’s more than just guy meets guy, it’s the same as when they meet a girl”

Participant 6

“And you know that it’s something that, you know, further on it should be something that you just don’t hear about, but something that we all [school pupils] have to be told about, ehm, how you can get support if you, if you feel like this, that’s very important”

Participant 1

There was a realisation, among participants, that teachers may themselves be intolerant towards homosexuality, or may simply not be trained in how to cope with matters of sexuality.

“I’d like to see more awareness within schools of LGBT issues and more acceptance within schools, ‘cos some of the teachers themselves might be homophobic, or they might be biased about things, they might even pick on you because of your sexuality, if there was more awareness it would be harder for them to do this”

Participant 6

“You don’t know whether they’re going to accept it, and teachers talk, among themselves in the staffroom so you don’t know what they’re going to say”

Participant 12

“I don’t think that teachers get that kind of education themselves and they don’t know how to deal with it. It’s just awkward if you ask a teacher about it, ‘cos they might not know, they might not have been taught about it”

Participant 6

The lack of parity of sex education has caused some adolescents to proactively work with schools in addressing the problem. This way the adolescent can guarantee that LGBT issues will be addressed.

“Well I’m trying to get a programme put together for my school to discuss LGBT issues and advertise this place [LGBT Youth]”

Participant 1

3.3.5 Discussion of principal category – EDUCATION

Section 2a continues to exert a legacy in Scottish schools today. ‘In general it was felt that little had been done to ensure that sexual orientation issues were included in the curriculum since the repeal of Section 2a’ (Scottish Executive, 2003b, p. 10).

Section 2a (and Section 28) was quite a misnomer. In the same year that Section 2a was enacted the Department of Education and Science released the following statement, in an attempt to clarify the impact of this legislation,

‘Section 28 [and 2a] does not affect the activity of school governors, nor of teachers...it will not prevent the objective discussion of homosexuality in the classroom, nor the counselling of pupils concerned about their sexuality’ (Deer, 1988).

Yet, possibly through confusion, perhaps through awkwardness, or even bowing to pressure from parents and religious organisations the discussion of homosexuality disappeared from British Schools. Today, teachers still appear reluctant to discuss issues of homosexuality and appear reticent to disclose their own homosexuality.

Savin-Williams (1994) noted that ‘many of the teachers and staff may be bisexual, lesbian, or gay but refuse to offer assistance because they fear that they will be accused of recruiting or converting youth’ (p. 264). Yet the Scottish Executive

(2003b) have noted that until LGBT teachers felt comfortable in disclosing their sexuality, without fear of prejudice or discrimination, that the situation for LGBT pupils was unlikely to become more positive.

Increasingly, schools are looking to their LGBT pupils to become involved in the development of education and support programmes. This is recognised by LGBT organisations that are endeavouring to build partnerships and provide support for peer education within educational establishments (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2004).

3.3.6 Description of principal category - RELIGION

The principal category **Religion** relates to either the religion of participants or how the religion of others impacts upon the lives of participants. This principal category contained only one subcategory, that of Control. The Control of religion appears to be related to the subjugation of homosexuality per se, in other words, the failure of some mainstream religions to acknowledge the existence of homosexual behaviour.

“As far as the religion that I’ve been brought up with and everything, it’s basically uncharted territory, it’s, it just shouldn’t exist, kinda thing. You know, they don’t have any views on it, it just shouldn’t exist, you know?”
Participant 8

The religious views of their family may cause some gay adolescents to conceal their sexuality. These adolescents fear that disclosure of their homosexuality may conflict with the family’s religious views, which may result in the family disowning the gay adolescent.

“Half ma family’s Chinese and I think that the Chinese are so set in their ways, they’re Buddhist and things. . . . {{4 sec}} I think that religion does have an impact, yeah, ‘cis I mean like, I don’t come out to ma dad because I think he might, I fear he might jist disown me because of religion”
Participant 9

“The reason I didn’t come out for quite a long time was my parents are dead religious, so I was kinda like scared (Int: OK) in that sense”
Participant 11

The controlling aspect of religion may also be more specifically related to sexual behaviours. In other words, some religions, in recognising the prevalence of homosexuality among its leaders and followers, may validate homosexual feelings but condemn homosexual sexual expression.

“I don’t know whether it was a priest, or if it was my dad talking about it, before I came out, you know, saying that homosexuality’s not a sin, it’s the act of it that’s the sin, so basically as long as you stay celibate for the rest of your life then it’s OK” Participant 8

Control was subsumed into two main themes, titled Sinful and AIDS. The sinful theme is one that is advocated by many Western religions and some participants felt that it was a salient feature of their religious experience. The following quote takes place in the context of the recent election of Pope Benedict XVI.

“It’s, I don’t know, just the kinda thing about the Pope, it kinda seems almost scary, ‘cos I saw it somewhere, it said it somewhere that he’s going to be even more stricter about things, so I was just kinda like, how is this going to affect the perception of my family towards me, you know, if they’re going to chapel every week and getting it battered into them that ‘It’s evil, It’s evil’, you know, ‘It’s a sin’ and then they come back to me, you know, it’s about how people will kinda perceive me, you know?” Participant 8

The threat of AIDS has also been used by some religions as a deterrent against homosexual behaviour. The motility of this idea from church to internalisation within the individual is highlighted in the following sequence of quotes.

“Ahm, well I was also very afraid of just, ah, you know, like my dad kinda kept on going on about how the priest had told them that gay people started the whole AIDS thing”
Participant 8

“You know anything I saw in documentaries or whatever were kinda like, you know, and so-and-so turned out to be gay and he died of AIDS, and everything with the gay word in it just ended that they died of AIDS”
Participant 8

“It just scared me really, I just kinda like, that’s going to be me, that’s what’s going to happen to me”
Participant 8

3.3.7 Discussion of principal category - RELIGION

The last three quotes highlight ways that religions may use propaganda to scaremonger. What was originally a heterosexually transmitted disease [AIDS] has been used by Christianity and other religions to frighten individuals into repressing their homosexual desires, after all God’s punishment for individuals who engage in homosexual sexual behaviour is that they will “catch” AIDS.

In Foucaultian terms this is a clear example of how a power authority, in this case religion, exerts control over a behaviour, which essentially threatens its future. If religion was to sanction homosexual behaviour, more people may engage in these behaviours and as a result the birth rate may fall. The consequence of a falling birth rate is that the number of people available to follow that religion and “spread its word” may diminish. Foucault (1998) has illustrated this point by stating ‘moral and religious exhortations, fiscal measures – tried to transform the sexual conduct of couples into a concerted economic and political power’ (p. 26).

The championing of procreative sex and subjugation of homosexual sex is a feature of Judaeo-Christian-Islamic traditions (Foucault, 1998; Sullivan 2003; Weeks, 2003). In condemning homosexual sexual behaviours these religions validate the individual and encourage him to see that God can tolerate his “unnatural and sinful” feelings as long as he doesn’t act upon them. In this way the monotheistic religions can be seen to be tolerant while ensuring that individuals engage in religiously-sanctioned procreative sex.

3.3.8 Description of principal category – RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

The principal category **Relationships with Others** is related to the impact of relationships with friends and family on the participants’ sexuality. This principal category consists of three subcategories; Family and Friends, Impact and New Beginnings. Family and Friends relates to the type of relationships participants have with their family and friends. Impact relates to how a disclosure of homosexuality affects these relationships and New Beginnings describes the transition from a heterosexual way-of-life to a homosexual way-of-life, the sense of genesis that some gay adolescents experience once they have accepted their sexuality.

FAMILY/FRIENDS

Discussion of this subcategory centred on relationship dynamics, typically, the structure of the family and discussions related to the choice of friends.

Participants described a number of different family structures. Some reported being raised in female dominated households, others described having families from other cultures, or being brought up in a chaotic environment.

“From the age of about seven I’ve lived in a female household, yeah, which of course my mum thinks is the reason I’m gay, but it’s not”
Participant 12

“My mum, yeah, she’s from another culture, she’s Polish. Poland’s quite bad for, it’s quite an intolerant country, but I mean in Poland it’s not just sexuality, I mean, if you’re Asian or Black in Poland, you kinda get people following you in the street and touching you for good luck”

Participant 2

“Ahm, I had quite a strange, like childhood, ‘cos I was in care for most of it. Yeah, my ma drinks quite a bit... I’ve lived in a variety of places, I lived in a flat, well basically a slum, with my ma, I was in some rough kid’s homes, you know? I was in foster care, you know? It’s not like kinda having a normal life”

Participant 3

Participants observed that their main attraction to friends was tolerance, although tolerance towards homosexuality need not have been explicitly spoken about.

Participants also reported the phenomena that a lot of their childhood friends are now homosexual.

“Ah, the stuff that attracts me ti ma pals is that they’re genuine, they’re genuine and honest and uh like that in a person and somebody that’s no jist pals wi yuh an falls oot wi yuh, but somebody for life an is goan a help yuh oot an stuff, an yuh can trust them, bit if a pal disnae help yuh oot an support yuh an gee yuh a wee cuddle wen your upset, then they’re no much aff a guid pal. Somebody that cun understan yuh, an stuff an cun have a laugh wi yuh, an yuh can act silly aroon, an who yuh can fall oot wi sometimes an fall back in. Uh guess that’s wit I look fur in a pal. Jist them wee daft things like walkin aboot the shops and walkin aboot toon, nuthin pure extravagant”

Participant 6

“I did come oot to one of ma friends who did keep it quiet and didn’t tell awnybody, and ehm, uh’ve awways had hur there, ‘cis it turns oot that I wis wantin to come oot tae hur when she wis wantin to come oot tae me”

Participant 9

“Looking back now I have had quite a few friends who didn’t come out at school and suddenly we all realised that we used to hang out together at school and it wasn’t until after school that everyone’s suddenly gone, “Oh wait a minute, you’re gay as well!” It’s strange that”
Participant 11

IMPACT

Participants observed that the impact of their sexuality upon close friends and family members was both positive and negative, they were also aware that relationships were likely to change as a result of a disclosure of homosexuality.

“Its brought me closer to some people, but driven me apart from others”
Participant 10

“ ‘cis if uh talk ti straight pals aboot gay guys, or aboot Will Smith or something, it jist, it jist disnae feel comfortable, uh jist don’t want ti put him in that situation”
Participant 6

The impact of the disclosure on family members was varied. It ranged from acceptance to shock and avoidance. However, in a few cases it was reported to have resulted in an openness of communication.

“It’s bin gud, ‘cis like things like, eh, jist bein able to talk to ma mah again, aboot who uh fancy and what uh’ve bin doin the day, who uh’ve bin goan ti see an, jist stuff like that”
Participant 6

NEW BEGINNINGS

The acceptance and disclosure of homosexuality represented a turning point in the lives of participants, they were aware that they could now make decisions to change

parts of their lives that they were previously unhappy with and had the freedom to seek out new friendships and relationships.

“That’s why I kinda, part of the reason I kinda moved out, to try and get my own views on things, you know? As well, because all I had was all I had been taught really, so I, it just seemed like that at that time the issue was kinda hard to dodge and I couldn’t talk to my parents about this, I just had to get my own views and get out on my own as well... it was just when I left home and went to uni and I thought, you know, just having that freedom, I thought I can do something about this and try to come to terms with it” Participant 8

“It was leaving a lot of different securities, all at once, but I don’t know, it was very liberating and yeah, it was probably harder than the time before but it was a kinda release as I can finally do something about this that was just the weird thing about me” Participant 12

Yet, these new beginnings appeared to be fraught with difficulties faced by all adolescents, regardless of their sexuality.

“I’m happy, very happy, verging on content. (*Int: OK*). Well, lonely, but in a different sense.

Int: When you say lonely in a different sense, what do you mean by that?

Ahm, More relationship-wise, than friendship”

Participant 1 & Interviewer

“Very difficult, ‘cis you don’t know, I wouldn’t, you wouldn’t, if I liked someone I wouldn’t know how to approach them. I’m still shy yet, and I need to build up confidence to go over and say, introduce yourself. But it’s very hard, especially if you live where I do as well, it’s a very small community, there are hardly any young people there,

so you hardly ever get the opportunity to meet young people”

Participant 10

3.3.9 Discussion of principal category – RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

The most salient feature of this principal category is that of friends and family. This is essential as, in addition to the challenges presented by adolescent development, the gay adolescent is likely to need additional support in coming to terms with their sexuality. This seems even more pertinent when researchers have claimed that psychopathology develops as a result of the adolescent attempting to cope with multiple stressors (Erikson, 1968; Coleman, 1974). Yet, one cannot discuss disclosure of sexuality without considering the second subcategory; Impact. Once the adolescent discloses their sexuality to family or friends there is likely to be some degree of impact, positive, or otherwise.

D’Augelli (2002) suggested that the reaction of parents to their child’s disclosure of homosexuality was significantly related to mental health. Indeed, the quality of the parent-child relationship prior to disclosure was considered important, the more positive the relationship, the more likely it was that parents would be accepting of their child’s sexual orientation.

To a lesser extent, relationships with peers were also correlated to psychopathology. D’Augelli reported that more than one third of his sample had reported losing a friend as consequence of coming out. However, this finding must surely be taken lightly, especially as adolescence may be characterized as a period of transitory peer relationships, it was unknown to what extent these friends would have been lost if the adolescent had not disclosed their sexuality. Adolescents, within the current study did report the loss of some friendships as a direct result of their sexual orientation, however, these adolescents reported that they had also gained friendships.

“It’s brought me closer to some people and in some ways it’s driven me apart from others”
Participant 10

“My best friend at the time, we don’t talk anymore, we actually hate each others guts...but other friends I had, I’ve become closer to them, one of my friends, that I didn’t really class as a friend at the time, she’s the one that’s stood by me and been there for me, like the whole way through it, and now we’re like really close”
Participant 9

The impact of relations with friends and family are likely to affect the ease with which the adolescent can embrace their homosexual identity. This is a key aspect of the subcategory New Beginnings. The adolescent may be less likely to identify as homosexual if he experiences early negative reactions related to his sexuality (Cass, 1979). In short, positive relationships with others are vital for the assimilation of a secure gay identity. These relationships may be likened to early attachment relationships in that they provide the gay individual with a secure base from which he may explore this new environment and concurrently meet key developmental tasks.

3.4 Main Categories

The present study generated four main categories, these were titled, “**help me, I’m different**”, “**coming out, coming in**”, “**fallout**” and “**normal adolescent life**”. Each of the main categories will briefly be described and discussed.

3.4.1 Description of main category – Help Me, I’m Different

This main category was dominated by participants’ feelings that they were somehow different from their peers (Appendix III). In some cases participants were not able to reflect upon these feelings and showed little insight.

"I just felt different, I don't know why"

Participant 1

In other cases participants seemed aware that these feelings may be attributed to their homosexuality.

"Yeah, just wee things, I thought right, I wasn't really sure at first, then I started getting bigger crushes and I was like definitely, I was like definitely, I knew I am. I knew I was different 'cis the other guys were playin fitbal and stuff like that, I was just completely different to them"

Participant 10

"I just felt kinda confused and different from my friends, so I wrote like an imaginary letter, I've told this story like so many times, to my big sister and I just sorta said these things like, "I feel different from other girls and sometimes I look at other girls in magazines and blah, blah, blah" and then I read it over, and it was only then when I read over it that from someone else's perspective that the world "lesbian" popped into my head"

Participant 12

For participants who realized that these feelings were the result of their homosexuality there followed a period of apprehension and confusion. A feature of this period was the lack of information on homosexuality and lack of direction as how to access support.

"I just didn't know what to do about it, there was nuthin, if you think that you are told to experiment in life, but I couldn't do that, I had no place to go and didn't know anybody, I was just kinda like solitary, there was nuthin you could do about it really"

Participant 10

"I used to search for any kind of reference in libraries and things... yeah, thinking about it, yeah, just some kind of information in

libraries or schools or doctor's surgeries, or something"

Participant 12

3.4.2 Discussion of main category – Help Me, I'm different

This category represents the first stage of gay identity development (Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1993). It is the stage during which young people become aware of their LGBT status and attempt to come to terms with it.

A number of studies have observed that psychopathology is likely to be reduced in the LGBT youth population if they are provided with a supportive and informed environment (Coleman & Hendry, 1999; Gonsiorek, 1993). Not only is there a dearth of information regarding access to LGBT youth services but many adolescents are unlikely to have met other LGBT individuals and may be reluctant to attend an LGBT youth group, as the impression exists that people attending supportive groups are socially deficient.

"There is an image that going along to a group suggests that you are needy and some sort of a social defect"

Participant 12

The lack of resources for LGBT youth and lack of advertising of these resources, may be a legacy of Section 2a, however Section 2a was repealed in 2000. In the intervening time the statutory agencies appear to have done little to work in partnership with LGBT organisations to positively promote and support sexual minority youth (Scottish Executive, 2000b).

3.4.3 Description of main category – Coming Out, Coming In

This category was dominated by the coming out process and the subsequent identification with homosexual others (Appendix IV).

Prior to coming out adolescents had expectations that others would react negatively to their disclosure of homosexuality.

“It’s also about your own self-confidence in the world and if you think that the whole world is suddenly going to turn against you and that you are going to be thrown out of your house, that everyone might reject you and that everyone that you’ve loved might suddenly go ‘whoa, you’re what?’”
Participant 11

“But you’re never quite sure how people will react. I’m getting used to it now, but it’s horrible”
Participant 12

As such, adolescents appeared to be quite controlled as to who they initially came out to and the way in why they came out.

“Well you don’t do it if you don’t trust them, to everybody that I’ve come out to, I wouldn’t have if I didn’t trust them in the first place”
Participant 1

“I’ve never actually come out to anyone face-to-face yet. The first person I told was, it was by text, then through an email...And the reason most of my school friends found out was because I changed one of my, like a profile, on my computer and I just wanted to see how long it would take this way”
Participant 2

Another major theme of this category was the need to identify with gay others, this process has been termed “coming in”. Some participants saw coming in as a means to form social supports, others as a necessary balance between the dichotomy of their straight and gay lives.

“Everybody was quite friendly and I didn’t have any friends here basically and they were like “come on, come on, we can go to this club, or we can go to that club, or we can do this,” at first I was a bit wary but it was a kinda instant friend network” Participant 11

“ ‘cis wen uh first came ti Youth Group that’s wen uh only first met gay teenagers, so it’s a guid thing, interactin wi people like ye” Participant 6

“It’s great it’s like, it’s like this really nice circle of friends and it’s just nice having that balance between like predominantly straight environments, like work and school and stuff... I think it’s sexually healthy to mix with people of the same sexual orientation” Participant 12

The final feature of this category was the change, participants had noticed, in their lives since coming out and coming in.

“It’s changed fur me because uh cun come oot ma shell mair, I cun be mair me, you know what uh mean? Uh used ti be dead closed up and too scared ti speak, ‘cis uh used ti think uh talked dead camp, which uh still think uh do, but ehm, uh jist think uh cun be mair masel” Participant 6

“My life has completely changed since, eh, a couple of years ago. I was never outside, I was always staying in the house, only had a couple of friends... and now, I’m rarely in the house, I’m out for a long time now, I’ve got a lot of new friends now, so I’m quite happy. I’m much happier now” Participant 2

3.4.4 Discussion of main category – Coming Out, Coming In

The main category “coming out, coming in” is conceptualised as a further developmental stage in the formation of gay identity. This stage represents the

process of disclosing one's sexuality, perceived changes in life since coming out and also the process of "coming in", in other words, the process of identifying with groups of lesbian and gay individuals (Petrow, 1990; Schindhelm & Hospers, 2004). The coming in process is not mutually exclusive of the coming out process. In identifying with other gay adolescents the gay teen is effectively coming out. He is sending the clear message "I am like you and I want to meet other gay teens".

Coming out is a unique and frightening process. A process during which individuals may be rejected by those they love. 'It [coming-out] has no counterpart in the lives of nongay people' (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993, p. 186).

Yet, coming out can be empowering, it can signal the end of deceit and a new beginning, one in which the gay individual can be honest. It also marks a period of pride, the gay individual is beginning to display pride in their sexuality and coming out may take place to reinforce this pride. Weeks (2003) has suggested that coming out is a political process during which the gay individual makes a dissident stand against heterodominance. These aspects were alluded to by two participants.

"I never actually had the privilege of coming out, people were told"
Participant 9

"It's not all doom and gloom, I've met some fantastic people and
done so many more things than if I hadn't come out" Participant 11

Borhek (1988) has observed that it is vital for adolescents to have a peer group with which to identify, yet 'for homosexual teens, there is no peer group' (Borhek, 1988, p. 123). This quote stresses the importance of LGBT youth services, which provide a means for LGBT identifying youth to come together and although contrived, youth are afforded the opportunity to experience "normal" peer relationships.

3.4.5 Description of main category – Fallout

This category consisted of three features. The reactions of others to the disclosure of homosexuality, the psychological consequences for the gay individual of these reactions and the coping strategies employed by the gay individual to cope with the psychological consequences (Appendix V).

While some reactions were positive, the majority of adolescents reported negative reactions to their disclosure of homosexuality. The negative reactions ranged from avoidance to homophobic bullying and were displayed by friends and family members.

“I mean, I got like bullied and stuff for bein Chinese and then I came oot and that’s why I snapped, it all added up, there wis just too much for me to handle at one point. At that point I actually thought about movin school, I actually went to the other school for a day, but I thought ‘No!’ I couldn’t go through coming out and everythin all over again, I might as well just go back and it’ll get easier. It didn’t but I wis like ‘fuck it, if you don’t like me, don’t like me, but I won’t like you back!’ gradually all the wee neds¹⁰ that had been geein me a hard time all left”
Participant 9

“When I was bein bullied a lot, you’re just sitting there a lot own your own, and it’s just kinda like lonely. People come up to you and they’ll try to get you to kinda come and join them, but you’re hesitant because you know that it might end up worse”
Participant 8

“wan time wen we were goan on holiday, me an ma aunties fiancé an ma auntie an aw that, he says ‘Oh you better not try awny funny business wi me in bed, like if uh find a ten poun note lyin on ma bed the next morning, if uh wis steamin, uh’ll know who it wis and ma bums sear’ uh wis dead embarrassed, uh jist wanted ti tell ‘im ti fuck off”
Participant 6

¹⁰ NEDS, a Glaswegian acronym for Non Educated Delinquents, it is the Scottish equivalent of Chav.

Participants reported that a consequence of these negative reactions and intimidation was low mood, anger and withdrawal.

“I was a depressed person, I was never happy, it was rare to see me with a smile on my face. I was the person who just sat indoors, I was quite overweight as well”
Participant 2

“I was a bit pissed off, very pissed off, I was quite angry about it for a while, because of al the tauntin at school and stuff. At one point I had a guy up against the wall and punched him”
Participant 9

A number of coping strategies were employed to contend with the psychological consequences of negative reactions. One participant, in recounting her experiences felt that physical retaliation was her only defense.

“If I’d been a softer person they would have ran riot, ran rings around me, they would have strung it oot for as long as they could have done. But I’m not like that, if you’re gonna bite me, I’m gonna bite you back and I’m not gonna bite the same, I’m gonna bite harder”
Participant 9

Other participants employed a range of psychological defenses. For example, some participants reported that they behaved as best as they could, in that way their inconspicuousness might not alert others to their homosexuality.

“My sister, she’s OK, but she’s a bit of an eejit sometimes, so I just kinda, I’m trying even harder not to get on my parents bad side because their having so much trouble with her”
Participant 10

"I just went through school and it wasn't a problem, 'cos I was a swotty kid, that's fine, I wasn't expected to be going out with boys"
Participant 11

Other participants recognized that some individuals immerse themselves in gay culture as a means to cope with negative reactions.

"Sort of drinking and taking drugs, just to escape...I guess because of homophobia and internalized homophobia, you know, people need to try to lose their inhibitions a bit, you know, ingrained self-hatred and homophobia and maybe going out and getting drunk is part of that and just a way to relax and cope a bit more"
Participant 12

3.4.6 Discussion of main category – Fallout

"Fallout" may be viewed as the main category representing a further stage in the development of gay identity. This category is conceptualised as others' reactions to the gay adolescent disclosing their homosexuality. It also represents the psychological consequences of these reactions and the coping strategies that the gay adolescent may employ as a consequence of the reactions of others.

While the majority of participants reported that they had experienced negative reactions to their disclosure of homosexuality, no participants directly reported long-term psychological consequences. It may be that participants were reluctant to divulge such personal information. It may have been especially difficult for participants who were interviewed as part of a group. However, it may be that negative reactions to a disclosure of homosexuality do not have a direct psychological impact on the individual.

Safren & Heimberg (1999) noted that psychological distress, evidenced by measures of depression, hopelessness and present suicidality, decreased upon participants coming out. This reduction in psychological distress was found regardless of the

reactions participants encountered. Indeed, Safren & Heimberg suggest that psychological distress reduces as a consequence of adolescents no longer having to live with the stress and fear of their sexuality being “found out”.

In terms of the current study, a potential reason why participants did not display psychopathology in response to negative reactions regarding their sexuality may be that they gained a sense of relief from disclosing their sexuality. It may be that the most stressful stage of gay identity development is the period leading up to disclosure of sexuality, a period characterized by fear of discovery and stress at being deceitful. It appears that once the individual discloses his or her sexuality this stress can dissipate, regardless of other's reactions. In this way the knowledge that people are aware of one's sexuality may actually be less stressful to the gay individual than fear of someone's reaction to a disclosure.

3.4.7 Description of main category - Normal Adolescent Life

This category is characterized by gay adolescents impressing the normality of their lives and the similarity of their experience to their heterosexual peers (Appendix VI). Themes emerging from this category were exam stress, sexual experimentation, pressure to be in a couple and use of the internet to connect with others.

“I feel quite stressed, at the end of the day it's probably just exam pressure”

Participant 1

“uh done stuff wen uh wis younger, jist wee stupid stuff, uh wouldn't say uh wis gay at that point, uh wis jist hayin a wee fiddle wi it”

Participant 6

“yeah, you're not cool if someone doesn't fancy you and things like that. Yeah, you're striving to try and find someone and I know it can become quite a goal, I know it was for me at one point, you know the

be-all-and-end-all, you know, that feeling that you have to be going out with someone, otherwise you can't be happy" Participant 12

The second feature of this category was the dreams and ambitions of participants. Typically ambitions were to travel, to be successful and to have a family.

"What uh wid like in the future, eh, is a guid job, that's why uh'm at college doin photography, an uh jist wan a bought hoose, an uh wid like a car, a family an a nice guy, uh'd like ti get married an a nice dug. An uh wid like ti go ti China an uh'd like ti settle doon, wi ma weans, watch ma weans grow old an stuff, an uh'd like ti adopt weans an aw" Participant 6

"I just want to be happy, settle down with a partner, maybe even have children, and of course, I'll have cats, I am lesbian after all" Participant 12

3.4.8 Discussion of main category – Normal Adolescent life

This category represented those experiences that were occurring within the adolescent's lives that were independent of their sexuality, or those that had minimal impact upon their sexuality.

The need to stress the normality of their lives and the similarity of their experiences with other adolescents could possibly be a result of feeling different from others most of the time. In some ways the gay adolescent may cling to the normal, mundane parts of their life, as these may be moments during which they "fit in"; moments during which they feel similar to others, if only for a brief period.

With the exception of one participant, all participants stated that a future wish was to settle down and have a family. This may be a consequence of heterodominance,

which reinforced to these adolescents, from a young age, that they should aspire to have children; to further their lineage. It may also be a consequence of more liberal attitudes towards gay parenting.

“Uh think most people accept it these days, uh think gay gays wid make guid parents an stuff, most, well the majority” Participant 6

3.5 Model of Gay Identity Development in Adolescence

Much of the analysis generated from the current study was process-laden, that is, related to the process of coming out. It therefore seemed appropriate to develop this process into a model of gay identity development in adolescence (Figure 4).

Three of the four main categories were placed together in developmentally sequential stages. Firstly, the stage of realisation of sexuality, “**help me, I’m different**” was followed by the stage signalling disclosure of sexuality and identification with other gay peers, the “**coming out, coming in**” stage. This stage preceded the final stage, which marked the reactions of others to a disclosure of homosexuality and the psychological consequences of these reactions. This final stage was known as “**fallout**”.

Two of these three developmental stages can be found, in various forms within the stage models of Cass (1984) and Troiden (1993). The “help me, I’m different” stage may be likened to Cass’s first two stages, identity confusion and identity comparison as well as to Troiden’s first two stages, sensitisation and identity confusion. The second stage of the current model, “coming out, coming in” may be likened to the identity tolerance, identity acceptance and identity pride stages of Cass’s model and to the identity assumption stage of Troiden’s model.

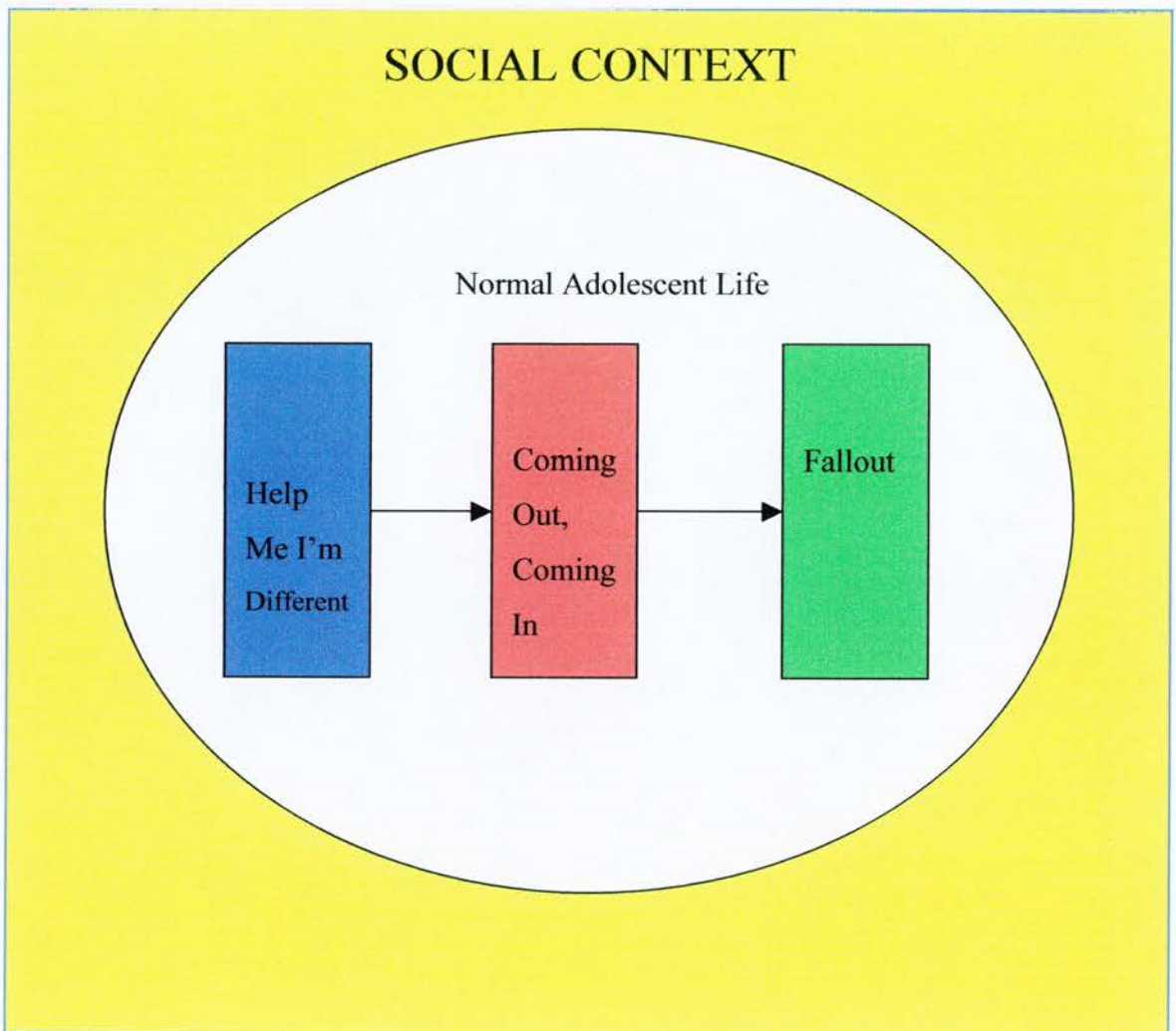


Figure 4: The Model of Gay Identity Development in Adolescence.

The “fallout” stage represents the reactions of others to a disclosure of homosexuality, the psychological consequences of these reactions for the gay adolescent and coping strategies the gay adolescent may adopt. This stage does not appear to exist within any current model of gay identity development. The absence of this stage from other models of gay identity development may be explained in terms of resilience. It could be that adults are more resilient than adolescents at coping with the reaction to a disclosure of homosexuality. Thus the “fallout” stage may be more pertinent to adolescent gay identity development than to adult gay identity development. Yet, similar levels of psychological distress have been reported for gay adults as for adolescents (King et al., 2003; Mills et al., 2004; Muehrer, 1995; Warner et al., 2004), this would suggest that the psychological consequences of the development of gay identity must be addressed and included within subsequent models, regardless if these models focus on gay identity development in adolescence or adulthood.

The developmental stages “help me. I’m different”, “coming out, coming in” and “fallout” all occur within the context of “normal adolescent life” (Figure 2). In other words, the development of gay identity takes place with the context of adolescents’ lives, this is highlighted by the following narratives.

“Aye, it’s hard like, ‘cis yuh’ve got all this stuff goan on like, wi ma sexuality an stuff. . . {{3 sec}} an awn top ‘a that uh’ve got other stuff goan on, like at school, exams an stuff an ma ma’s doin ma heid in an aw”

Participant 5

“We’re just the same as other young people, we’ve got the same crap going on, it’s just that we have, we have, well, yeah, we have extra crap, you know the stuff to do with our gayness and stuff”

Participant 12

However, all of this, the developmental stages and the context of the adolescent’s life takes place within a wider “social context”. “Social context” relates to relationships

with others, society at large, education, religion, and work. Regardless of the stage of development or whatever is going on in the adolescent's life the social context in which we live, exerts overall dominance upon the life of the gay youth. The current study will illustrate this model through the use of four fictional vignettes.

3.5.1 Vignettes

Hugo is a fifteen year-old male. He has a large group of friends and is a member of his school football team. Hugo reports that he feels "different from his friends", many of his friends have girlfriends and Hugo feels he is being pressurized into dating a girl. Hugo has noticed that he has become attracted to some of his male friends, consequently, he is worried that he may be gay but hopes that "it's just a phase".

In terms of gay identity development, Hugo is at the "help me, I'm different" stage. Hugo is aware of his feelings of "differentness" but is not yet at the stage to attribute these feelings to homosexuality. In addition, Hugo's "normal adolescent life" is exerting an influence over his gay identity development. Hugo feels that peers are pressurizing him into a heterosexual relationship. The "social context" may also been seen to be influencing Hugo's current situation. Heteronormative values, that is, those values accepted by society, which promote heterosexuality as the acceptable form of sexual expression, are exerting an influence. Indeed, Hugo's friends appear not to have accepted the possibility that he might be gay, rather they expect that Hugo is straight.

Beth is a sixteen year-old female. Beth has been aware for a number of years that she is sexually attracted to females. Beth has come out to her mother and aunt, but is worried about coming out to her father as his strong Jewish faith rejects homosexuality.

Beth's sexual identity development is at the "coming out, coming in" stage, she has accepted her sexuality and has begun disclosing it to heterosexual others. Yet the

influence of Beth's "social context" is limiting further sexual identity development. Beth recognizes that her sexuality conflicts with her religion and potentially may seriously affect her relationship with her father and the wider Jewish community, as such, Beth is reluctant to disclose her homosexuality routinely.

Graeme is a twenty three year-old male, who is "out" to all of his friends. Graeme recently came out to his family. His parents have struggled to accept his homosexuality but Graeme feels that things have progressed, when recently his parents invited Graeme and his boyfriend to stay for the weekend. Graeme's sister, whom Graeme has "always been close to", is having difficulty accepting the news of his homosexuality and has refused to speak to Graeme for the past six months. Graeme reports that he cannot cope with the thought that his sister may never talk to him and has reported feeling "depressed". Graeme's GP prescribed him a course of antidepressants approximately six weeks ago.

Graeme may be seen to be at the "fallout" stage. The negative reactions of his sister, and to some extent his parents' early reaction appears to have impacted upon Graeme's mood, resulting in him feeling quite low. The "social context" is influencing Graeme's development as the family dynamics are impacting upon Graeme's further sexual development.

Alan is a fourteen year-old male. He was recently excluded from school after a teacher discovered Alan "sexually experimenting with another boy" during a residential field trip. Alan maintains that he was only kissing the other boy and feels that if he had been caught kissing a girl it would have been overlooked. However, the Catholic ethos of the school could not condone this behaviour and the school was anxious that this behaviour might progress into more sexualised behaviours. Alan is worried that this incident may affect his chances of getting accepted at university to study law.

In this case little information has been presented as to the stage of Alan's sexual development. Rather the important factors are "normal adolescent life" and the "social context". Alan was sexually experimenting, this is a feature of "normal adolescent life" and is an important aspect of the increasing independence of the adolescent (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). However, the "social context" of Alan's religion and education has also sent the clear message that his sexuality will not be tolerated.

3.6 Research Diary

Three main themes emerged from the research diary regarding the analysis of transcripts. Those themes were "**that's not what I said**", "**model development**" and "**influence on data.**"

"**That's not what I said**" was related to my fears of not adequately representing the views of the participants and not getting across, to the reader, a sense of the difficulties participants had overcome and the challenges they still face.

"More interviews in Glasgow, absolutely shattered! The first interview was a sixteen year old female, the second a fifteen year old male. Had loads of admiration for them both. They showed lots of determination to be themselves, even though people weren't accepting of them and even though they were at times frightened. These two participants just wanted to help others, they had had a hard time and now recognized that other young people were probably in similar positions and may have needed their help to access similar resources. This made me think about an article I had been reading it stated that psychopathology in gay and lesbian teens was related to lack of support and lack of information. Made me think, where would these teens and others like them be without LGBT youth services???"

03/05/05

I was keen to acknowledge the selflessness displayed by these participants and their enthusiasm to ensure that other gay adolescents should not experience similar

difficulties. I think this is important for two reasons. Firstly, literature suggests that an important process in the development of gay identity is the acknowledgement and association with gay others. Secondly, the work of gay youth in supporting others to negotiate an often difficult developmental trajectory is rarely acknowledged, indeed, these youth are by all accounts "hidden supporters".

On a more personal level, my youth was marked by the absence of LGBT organisations. Therefore I can see how these organisations could have helped me, they could have supported me to accept my homosexuality and possibly more importantly, they could have provided me with the contact of other gay peers.

The second theme "**model development**" related to the overall analysis, the generation of the categories and how the categories fit together into the model of gay identity development in adolescence. Initially I was quite worried that the themes generated by the current study were so process-driven, however, having had the opportunity to reflect upon them it was clear that the participants were describing important milestones in their development, and that these milestones could be integrated to form a model, which may potentially give a clear indication of the process involved in the development of gay identity and the important contextual factors that influence this development.

"I was really worried that a lot of the analysis was process-driven. When I sat down and thought about it I realised that this is better than a highly interpretative analysis as the process-driven analysis will more closely resemble the narrative of participants" 14/06/05

I reflected upon my own experiences as a gay adolescent and how they might be described in terms of the current model. Each of the principal categories, religion, education, society and relationships with others were significant features of my experience.

"I've been thinking about how I can relate the model of gay identity development to my experience. Social context had a great influence on the development of my gay identity. The ethos of my schooling was religious, so much so, there was no mention of any types of sexual expression, the only time it was mentioned was for the teaching of fifth year biology. We were made to feel that sex was dirty and not something we should do; gay sex, well that was just deviant. These views were very similar to the views upheld by Irish society; sex is bad and should only be done for procreative purposes. In terms of relationships with others, homosexuality wasn't discussed, it wasn't generally talked about and certainly not by me, as this might have alerted people to something that I wanted to keep hidden. On the occasions homosexuality was mentioned, it was pejorative. I guess I can clearly see how the social context affected my own gay identity development. In hindsight, my gay identity couldn't develop while I remained in a restricting social context, a context in which there was no opportunity for the discussion or expression of homosexuality"

23/06/05

The final theme was termed "**influence on data.**" This theme related to the influences my own personal experiences had on data collection and analysis. On reflection I believe that my own inquisitiveness, may at times have lead the analysis. While I did not have a personal agenda or detailed interview schedule, it may have been that my personal interests in comparing the experience of participants with my own experiences could have steered the dialogue in directions it wouldn't have gone naturally. The following sections of transcripts reflect this.

"Can I take yous back to whenever you first realised that you were gay, tell me what age you were and what was going around for you at that time?"

Transcript 3

"OK. . {{2 sec}} So thinking back to how it was before, how would you describe. {{1 sec}} your experience"

Transcript 2

These quotes are in themselves quite innocuous and are possibly issues that participants would have raised themselves. However, they represent points at which I changed the direction of the interviews. Once aware of this, I explicitly attempted not to change the direction of the narrative. I did this by probing issues further, for instance, asking participants what their thoughts and feelings were regarding particular phenomena. In this way, I believe I relinquished control of the narrative to the participants, who were then able to steer the dialogue in the direction they wished.

4 Reflections

This section will begin with a summary and reflection upon the current research. Implications of the current findings for theory and clinical practice will then be considered. Following this the paper will move to provide a critique of the current investigation, followed by a discussion of issues that were raised during the research. The current paper shall conclude with the researcher's reflections upon the research process.

4.1 Summary of Research

Twelve participants took part in the current study. Eight participants identified as male and four as female. The age of participants ranged from fifteen years to twenty-one years. Participants were recruited from LGBT youth organisations in both Edinburgh and Glasgow.

The current study adopted a qualitative research methodology. Grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was employed as the research technique and data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews. The aims of the current investigation were to explore the experiences of young gays and lesbians and to form hypotheses regarding the development of gay identity.

The current research generated one core category and four main categories (Figure 3 & Appendices III-VI). The core category was called "**social context**" and discussed the impact of religion, education, society at large and relationships with others upon the formation and maintenance of gay identity. The main category "**help me, I'm different**" related to gay adolescents experience of feeling different from their peers and the realisation that this "differentness" was homosexuality. The second main category "**coming out, coming in**" represented the process of disclosure of

homosexuality and identification with gay others. The third main category “**fallout**” reflected the reactions of others to a disclosure of homosexuality and the psychological consequences for the individual, of these reactions. The final main category “**normal adolescent life**” discussed issues of adolescent development unrelated to sexual identity, this category also considered the dreams and ambitions of adolescents.

The core and main categories were formulated into a Model of Gay Identity Development in Adolescence (Figure 4). This model recognised the categories “help me, I’m different”, “coming out, coming in” and “fallout” as three developmentally sequential stages. These stages took place within the context of “normal adolescent development”, in other words the development of sexual identity takes place within the context of other adolescent development. However, the whole model was situated within the “social context” of the adolescent. In other words, the social context in which adolescents lived influenced both their adolescent development and the development of gay identity.

4.2 Investigator Reflections on the Present Findings

The main finding of the current study was that the social context of the individual was the most important factor in the development of gay identity. Erikson (1968) noted the “tripartite nature of identity”; he claimed that identity formation takes place within the context of the individual’s biological needs, psychological needs and the cultural milieu in which the individual resides. Thus Erikson was aware of the role of social context in the development of identity. However, Erikson believed that social context was of lesser importance than the individual’s biological and psychological characteristics. According to Erikson, the social context provided the opportunity for the expression of identity, however, it was not directly involved in the formation of identity.

In contrast Coleman & Hendry (1999) noted 'the sexual development of young people is affected in a fundamental sense by what is taking place around them' (p. 102). These authors were aware of the importance of adolescents' social context on the formation of sexual identity. They placed the family at the centre of this social context but also noted the importance of peers, religion, education and the media. Coleman & Hendry suggest that these social institutions offer the adolescent an important means of communication regarding sexual development and sexual identity formation; they provide forums in which information may be sought, questions asked and myths dispelled. In addition, these institutions offer a means of modelling normative values and appropriate behaviours. In this way clear boundaries are set in place enabling the adolescent to become aware of the limits of sexual expression and potential sanctions for the breaking of these boundaries.

However, Coleman & Hendry did not specifically consider the impact of the adolescents' social context on the development of gay identity. Sexual minority youth grow up in a heterodominant social milieu, which openly promotes heteronormative sexual expression. Thus from an early age sexual minority youth are aware that their sexual attractions are socially condemned and consequently they must rationalise the expression of their attraction with the effect that this may have on family, friends, religion and others.

It is the contention of the present author that homosexuality is a social construct. It follows that if homosexuality is a socially constructed the context within which this construction was made should be considered significant, after all it is this social context that determines the reactions of society as a whole to issues of homosexuality.

In short, the social context of development is an important concern for all adolescents. It is the social context that determines whether the adolescent is

provided with a nurturing environment ripe for development or an environment in which development occurs within an atmosphere of isolation and stigmatisation.

4.3 Participant Reflections on the Present Findings

Aims of the current research were to explore the experience of young gays and lesbians and to form hypotheses regarding the development of gay identity. Upon completion of the investigation four participants were chosen at random and asked to take part in a feedback session. This session also acted as a member check or verification check. In other words, this feedback session enhanced the credibility of the current study by affording participants the opportunity to reflect on the research findings and determine if these findings accurately represented shared or individual realities.

Narratives from the member check session indicated that participants agreed with the findings of the current study; suggesting that on this occasion credibility was high.

“It makes sense, you know we all have things goan on in our lives, but at the end of the day it’s how others view us that’s important. I think a lot of people see us as unnatural, that is slowly changing but I still think a lot of people see us as unnatural. So if people have this idea that we are unnatural it’s gonna effect how they are with us – yeah society’s important”
Participant 8

“It’s good to know that it all ties in, you know what we said and that other gay folk agree wi ye. I think that gay folk are all different but a lot of us have had similar things happen to them”
Participant 10

“Aye, uh agree wi that, you know yir jist normal and ye have tae deal wi all the normal thingies that other folk have tae deal wi but ye have tae deal wi all the gay stuff an aw”
Participant 6

4.4 Implications of the Present Findings

The present findings will be considered in terms of the implications they have for theories of gay identity development and the implications they have for clinical practice.

4.4.1 Implications for the Theory of Gay Identity Development

There appears a paucity of models specifically related to the development of gay identity in adolescence. This may be a consequence of the different ages at which homosexual individuals become aware of their sexuality. Herdt & McClintock (2000) have noted, 'the age of 10 was shown to be the developmental marker for first memorable attraction toward others, regardless of the gender of the object' (p. 597). Thus, these authors suggest that the 'magical age of ten' heralds the beginning of sexual identity development. An implication of this is that researchers should consider the development of gay identity to begin in adolescence, and as such models of gay identity development should contain an adolescent component.

Yet, not every adolescent discloses or even acknowledges their homosexuality during adolescence. The current model would suggest that, during this period, the lack of acknowledgement or disclosure of homosexuality is likely to be related to the adolescent's social context. Further, the adolescent's social context is the most important factor in the development of gay identity. This implies that adolescents living within social contexts that are tolerant towards homosexuality are more likely to begin the assimilation of their gay identity before adolescents who live in a homosexually intolerant environment.

Unlike other theories of gay identity development the final stage of gay identity development (Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1993) appears absent from the current model. This stage has been termed "identity synthesis" (Cass, 1984) and "commitment" (Troiden, 1993). During this stage gay individuals assimilate homosexuality as part

of their identity, but not necessarily the core feature of their identity, thus individuals feel comfortable mixing with both homosexual and heterosexual others.

The absence of this stage from the current model may be a reflection of the developmental stage of the participants. It may be that participants, within the current study, had not reached the point at which their sexual identity was assimilated with their identity. An indication of this may be the fact that participants were using the services of LGBT youth organisations, thus participants felt that they required additional support to cope with some aspect of their sexuality. It seems unlikely that individuals who have reached the final stages of gay identity development would require additional support to cope with some aspect of their sexuality. Thus it appears that participants within the current study had not reached the final stages of gay identity development. Drawing on larger populations and recruiting from the general population, as opposed to an LGBT population, might help in the determination of a final stage of homosexual identity development in adolescence.

The absence of mental illness is also a key factor in the current study. While a number of participants reported that they had, on occasions, experienced symptoms of negative affect as a result of their homosexuality. There was a notable absence of the discussion of chronic psychological distress within the current study.

Gonsiorek (1993) has suggested that there is no link between sexual orientation and psychopathology, further, 'the majority of gay and lesbian adolescents, given the opportunity to develop within a supportive and informed environment present no more serious mental health problems than the general adolescent population' (p. 471).

Within the present investigation, the absence of psychological distress may be attributed to participants attending an LGBT youth group and consequently having

access to a 'supportive and informed environment'. It follows that the recruitment of participants from outside LGBT may provide the opportunity to determine if a supportive and informed environment does offer protection against psychological distress.

4.4.2 Implications for Clinical Psychology Practice

One of the most helpful elements of the current research, for clinical psychology practice, has been the establishment of the 'Model of Gay Identity Development in Adolescence'. The model takes into account the trajectory of gay identity development in adolescence, acknowledging the influence of contextual factors on this development. Due to the relative importance adolescents placed on contextual factors over issues of sexuality, gay adolescents may appear invisible within services. This invisibility may be a consequence of the individual's stage of gay identity development, for instance, not having accepted their homosexuality, or not having reached the point of disclosure. Further, the gay adolescent may have accepted his or her homosexuality but find that their social context (family, friends, religion, and school) may prevent them from integrating their homosexuality with their identity, thus in an attempt to conceal their homosexuality they may present to services with difficulties related to their social context, or related to general adolescent development.

Adolescents who are at the 'coming out, coming in' and 'fallout' stages will have begun to accept their homosexuality and may have begun to rationalise and internalise their sexuality as part of their identity. In contrast adolescents at the 'help me, I'm different' stage may not be aware that their feelings of 'differentness' can be attributed to homosexuality. While the current author is aware that many adolescents feel that they are different from their peers, it is important that the clinical psychologist bear in mind that feelings of 'differentness' may be attributed to homosexuality. However, there is a caveat associated with this stage; because adolescents at this stage of development have not yet accepted their homosexuality

any discussion regarding sexuality may prove to be too challenging and may result in disengagement from treatment and even premature drop-out.

Gay Affirmative Therapy is a psychotherapy, which specifically challenges pathological views of homosexuality (Cross, 2001; Harrison, 2000). It is a popular choice of psychotherapy to help the individual reconcile the struggle of their sexuality and come to terms with their homosexuality as a natural and valid choice. Gay affirmative therapy is an appropriate choice for some individuals and offers them an additional source of support. However, the current model would suggest that gay affirmative therapy is not an appropriate style of psychotherapy for adolescents.

The current model asserts that the most important factor in the development of gay identity is the adolescent's social context. It follows that interactions with key others is a significant factor in the adolescent's social context and therefore in the development of gay identity. If the adolescent is having difficulty adjusting or coming to terms with his or her homosexuality, it is likely that psychotherapies, which focus on relationships with key others, for example Inter-Personal Therapy or Systemic approaches, may help the gay adolescent resolve interpersonal difficulties within his or her social context and consequently the gay adolescent may be better placed to assimilate his or her gay identity.

The most important thing a psychologist can do for gay adolescents struggling to cope with sexuality is provide them with an informed and supportive environment. Making contact with local LGBT youth leaders, or attending LGBT youth groups may provide the psychologist with valuable insights to pass on to the anxious client. Advertising the Local LGBT youth group may also be helpful, this does not have to be conspicuous, but can be advertised along with other groups, as participants noted that LGBT resources should be advertised in such a way that they do not draw attention to the reader.

The question arises, who is best placed to work with gay adolescents? In short, this question is moot. The demand for child and adolescent mental health services coupled with the shortage of psychologists within these services is likely to prevent the allocation of specific therapists to specific clients. In helping gay adolescents, the gay psychologist is likely to be able to reflect upon his own experiences. Yet heterosexual psychologists will also bring a range of life experiences to the consulting room and it is unlikely that all of the gay client's difficulties will be related to his or her sexuality.

The gay psychologist is also faced with the additional dilemma of whether or not to divulge his sexuality to the gay client. Taylor et al. (1998) have stated

'Whilst our gender and ethnicity are generally explicit, gay psychologists and therapists must often make a judgement as to whether or not they should disclose their sexuality...And yet, if we attempt to "withhold our sexuality" do we not risk communicating something about "gayness" as secretive, something to be denied, hidden away as something bad' (p. 10).

The present paper cannot answer this dilemma, the issue of whether or not to disclose sexuality to clients is a matter of judgement for the individual psychologist and one likely to be determined by a costs and benefits analysis for both the client and the psychologist.

4.5 Issues Raised During the Current Research

A number of issues were raised during the current research. These issues are related to observations of the clients, interaction with the clients and analysis of the data.

The first issue was related to the narrative of one participant, in short that narrative did not seem authentic. The participant recalled a childhood marked by maternal

alcoholism and residential care, until the age of sixteen. This in itself is not extraordinary, however, the participant subsequently recalled episodes of being schooled abroad, arguments involving firearms and extensive travelling around the world.

“The States, probably not as much, they’re not as open as they try to make out, especially in the South, somewhere like Alabama, yeah. Ahm, Amsterdam obviously, stereotypically gay capital of Europe, nobody’s bothered, you know, just another poof, who cares sorta thing. France pretty good about it, yeah pretty easy going. Yeah most of Western Europe actually has been OK. Lebanon was a bit sort of {{interviewee laughs}} odd, I didn’t mention it to anyone I met, it probably wouldn’t have been a good move. The same in the rest of the countries in the Middle East”¹¹

After the interview the researcher was informed by a third party that the participant had a history of severe and enduring mental illness and was currently “known” to mental health services. Indeed the participant alluded to these mental health difficulties in a discussion regarding motivations to move to Edinburgh.

“For some reason this college seems to attract a lot of people with psychiatric problems”

Of course these incidents may be authentic and while there is no tangible evidence that the narrative is either factual or fictional the researcher had a “gut instinct” that elements of this narrative were untrue. Flicker (2004) proposed that qualitative enquiry relies on the honesty of participants as the researcher can only work with the narrative provided. Flicker goes on to state that there are three approaches to dealing with a narrative the researcher considers untrue, those approaches have been labeled “the cynic”, “the sceptic” and “the seeker”.

¹¹ On this occasion the participants identifier will be omitted to further protect the client’s anonymity.

The cynic, according to Flicker, believes that the participant has lied, therefore his narrative cannot be trusted and it should be excluded from the analysis. The sceptic believes that the participant may have embellished some aspects of his narrative, but not others, therefore the narrative should be analysed with caution. The seeker includes the participant's narrative in the analysis and he believes it is unimportant whether the narrative is authentic or not, this is the narrative that has been presented.

After some consideration the current author is adopting a "seeker" approach. The role of the qualitative researcher is not to authenticate the participant's narrative. The narrative is the raw data that the participant has presented and as such it must be included in the research. A social constructionist perspective would reinforce this approach. Social constructionism asserts that multiple realities exist; the narrative presented by the participant is just one of these multiple realities and reflects the reality of the participant at that point in history.

The second issue to be raised was the clear cultural differences between participants from Edinburgh and participants from Glasgow. The Edinburgh youth group attracted a range of members, from local school pupils to students at the universities. The majority of people attending the Edinburgh groups appeared to be based in Edinburgh. In contrast, the Glasgow youth group appeared to attract people from a broader range of socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, people attended the Glasgow group from quite a wide area, stretching outside Glasgow to neighbouring burghs.

Another striking difference between the narratives of participants from Edinburgh and Glasgow was their willingness to acknowledge the need for social support. While Edinburgh participants acknowledged their social isolation and desire to develop a network of friends,

"I hardly ever socialised, I never went out, ehm. . . {{2 sec}} I didn't have a lot of self- confidence" Participant 2

"Coming to the group has been the biggest change, well not so much the group as it has given me a lot of friends, something I never really had before this, I'm usually quite self-contained" Participant 1

Glasgow participants were keen to stress their pre-existing social supports.

"I had a life before I came to the Group, aye, I was going out with my friends and having a laugh beforehand or, going over to a friend's house and watching a DVD, going to the cinema, shopping, ahm, I mean I didn't particularly rely on the Group for a social life but. . . {{3 sec}} I decided to come" Participant 4

"Ahm, aye, uh hud a social life before an that an aw as well, Uh jist came here ti meet other gay guys and gay wimen an stuff, but I didn't come because uh didn't have a social life or anything, jist came because like, uh wanted ti see, talk about, talk ti another gay guy like, or another gay woman an stuff" Participant 6

In a later interview a participant alluded to this difference by stating that there is a general perception that the people who attend social groups are, in some way, socially deficient. It may have been that Glasgow participants were more aware of this perception, or perhaps they may just had better social supports.

A further issue raised during the analysis of the data was that of gender differences. The current study recruited eight males and four females. This gender imbalance was representative of the higher number of males attending LGBT youth groups relative to females. Possible explanations for this gender imbalance could be that males typically engage in sexual activity at an earlier age than females (Herdt &

McClintock, 2000), therefore adolescent males may be more aware of their homosexuality than adolescent females, consequently, more males may seek appropriate supports. In addition, socially sanctioned, gender role behaviour enables females to engage in close physical friendships with other females. In contrast, close physical friendships between adolescent and even pre-pubescent males are socially condemned. Thus lesbian adolescents may be better able to conceal sexual relationships, passing them off as close friendships, and in doing so, avoid drawing attention to their sexual minority status.

Within the current study there did not appear to be major gender differences in the data. Both males and females recounted similar experiences during the coming out process. Females, like their male counterparts, stressed that this process takes place within the context of normal adolescent development and within the individual's social context. It may be that adolescents attending LGBT youth groups have a shared reality, fostered through the mutual discussion and comparison of individual's experiences and through contextual factors in attending LGBT groups, which may result in gay adolescents placing less emphasis on gender differences than on differences between sexualities.

The final issue that was raised was the phenomena of insider research. In other words, researchers investigating a group of which they are a member. While the positivist researcher might claim that insider research can only reduce objectivity, there are a number of advantages to insider research. Insider research may hasten the development of rapport between researcher and participants. In addition, difficult to reach populations may be more amenable to insider research, as there is some fundamental understanding of the participants' experiences.

Further, the researcher may be adept at identifying subtleties of a shared experience which other researchers may miss. Insider research may provide the motivation to conduct research in areas typically overlooked by mainstream researchers (Asselin,

2003; Harrison, 2000). Indeed, Gubrium (1994) has gone as far as to assert that the in-depth interviewer must have substantial familiarity with the phenomena under investigation if he is to avoid missing crucial information or pursuing unimportant leads.

4.6 Methodological Critique

Two criticisms were identified regarding the current methodology. These criticisms were related to sampling and interview techniques.

Purposive sampling ensured that participants had self-identified as lesbian or gay. While this aided with the exploration of experience pertinent to lesbian and gay adolescents, it excluded three populations of lesbian and gay adolescents (Scottish Executive, 2003b).

The populations excluded by the current study were adolescents who do not identify as lesbian or gay but who have same-sex attractions and same-sex sexual encounters. The second excluded population are gay adolescents who are fearful of disclosing their homosexuality and who consequently conceal it, these adolescents are therefore unknown to be gay. The third excluded population are gay or lesbian adolescents who acknowledge their sexuality to self and others but do not seek support from LGBT youth services. Inclusion of the above three populations would provide a more comprehensive overview of the development of gay identity in adolescence, it would also provide a voice to 'the most hidden type of LGBT respondent' (Scottish Executive, 2003b, p. 45).

The use of single interviews as been criticised by researchers as providing a superficial view of participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2003). Charmaz suggests that during single interviews the participant's narrative is 'cleaned up for public discourse' (p. 275). She advocates conducting of multiple interviews with each

participant as a means to sustain involvement and prevent 'whatever proclivities a respondent has to tell only the public version' (p. 275).

The use of multiple interviews with an adolescent population would have been beneficial for a number of reasons. Firstly, it may have facilitated rapport building, consequently reducing participant anxiety. Secondly, the use of multiple interviews may have afforded participants with the opportunity to be socialised into this style of research, which may have facilitated greater reflection and insight. Finally, multiple interviews could have provided the researcher with the opportunity to clarify narrative and probe certain areas in greater depth.

4.7 Research Diary

This section of the research diary holds my reflections on the whole research process. One of my main anxieties throughout the research was the decision, or not to include a subjective element to the research and how much personal information to disclose in this subjective narrative.

"It's been a difficult decision, deciding whether to include excerpts from my diary in the write-up. I guess it just seems so unnatural to put personal elements of myself into research when I've been so used to positivist objectivity being held as the gold standard. I've also been worried about including such personal information as this thesis will sit on a shelf, in a library and can potentially be read by anyone. What will people think? Who will they think I am? Do I want such personal information available to anyone? I know that this information is important. It's fear of the unknown! Fear that others who do not know me will judge me on my sexuality without having the opportunity to meet me first"
16/12/04

"I've decided to include my personal context and elements of the research diary. It's important that the reader is aware of the context

of this research and I guess my personal insights, or ramblings take place within the research context"

04/01/05

In reflecting upon the whole research process I realise that the current study has challenged my own perceptions of homosexuality and indeed, that my perceptions of homosexuality are rooted within heterodominance.

"I hold this straight-acting label as some ideal. I now realise that it's groups of frightened gay men and women trying not to feel too isolated in a heterodominant world. God! I see it now, if we make concessions to appear straight, we are more likely to be accepted"

26/04/05

From beginning to end the current research project has sustained my enthusiasm. It has presented me with insight as to experiences I have shared with participants and also highlighted socio-cultural differences between my experiences as a gay adolescent and the experiences of gay adolescents in Central Scotland today.

"I've really enjoyed this research, can't believe I'm saying that! I think that qualitative methodology was a good choice as I have been really interested in what participants have said, it's just brought their experience alive for me. This research has also done something I was quite reluctant to do, forced me to be quite reflective on my own experiences. I need to be aware where participant's stuff ends and my stuff starts. I don't know why I was reluctant to do this, I guess at heart we all feel different and are reluctant to let others see that, in case they think we are freaks! In hindsight reflecting on these experiences can only be a good thing for my clinical practice, I have greater clarity about what aspects of myself and my own experience I am and am not comfortable with and what areas I need to work on"

04/06/05

4.8 Final Thoughts

The current study has highlighted the role that contextual factors play in the formation of gay identity. The social context of the adolescent is paramount to the development of gay identity. The following quote from one of the participants highlights the importance of the social context of adolescent sexuality. The participant was asked to consider what homosexuality meant to him. Indeed, the last part of this quote was considered so salient to the current findings that it formed the title of the current research.

“Its about a lotta things. It’s about who uh fancy, it’s about what ma family an ma pals think, it’s about how people treat me. It’s really about, it’s about mair than who uh kiss”

Participant 6

5 References

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APPENDIX I

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Participant Number	Gender	Age	Occupation
1	Male	17	School
2	Male	17	School
3	Male	21	College
4	Male	18	Works
5	Male	16	School
6	Male	17	College
7	Female	18	College
8	Male	21	University
9	Female	16	School
10	Male	15	School
11	Female	21	Works

APPENDIX II

INFORMATION & CONSENT FORMS

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Section of Clinical and Health Psychology
SCHOOL OF HEALTH IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

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Royal Edinburgh Hospital

Edinburgh EH10 5HF

Telephone 0131 537 6000

or direct dial 0131 537

Fax 0131 537 6760

The Experience of Gay and Lesbian Adolescents.

I would like to invite you to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether you would like to take part or not, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others, if you wish. If there is anything you are unclear about, don't hesitate to contact me (contact details are listed below).

What is the study about?

The study is being carried out to increase understanding of the experience gay and lesbian adolescents face in growing-up. The study would also like to investigate potential difficulties gay and lesbian adolescents may face and how they cope with these difficulties.

What will I be asked to do if I choose to take part?

Once you have agreed to take part in the study I will contact an LGBT Youth Worker. I will then arrange to meet you, either individually, or as part of a group. The meeting will take the form of a semi-structured interview, during which you will be asked a number of questions, for example, "How do you get on with your family, or friends?" "Has it been difficult for others to accept that you may be gay or lesbian?" The meeting will last about one hour.

I would like to audiotape this meeting, just so I don't forget anything that is said. I will use the tape to type out everything that is said during the interviews. This is an important part of the study as I will use the information held on the tapes as the basis of the study.

The information you provide on the tapes will be used in this study, and may be used later in other studies too. However, your name will never be recorded on the tapes or when I type up the information from the tapes. This means that the information is anonymous. That is, your name will not be recorded. It will be impossible for anybody to identify you in any reports that I write.

I am interested in everything you say, even if you have not talked about things very much before. Young people sometimes feel uncomfortable talking about their feelings, and may also feel that people do not listen properly. In this project I want to listen to everything you have to say, so that I can find out what things are really like for you. I understand that talking about feelings can be difficult and I will do all I can to make this easier.

Why have I been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part as you have attended an LGBT Youth Group. I am looking for adolescents who have attended these groups as they may be feeling attractions to people of the same sex.

Do I have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part, the choice is yours. If you do want to take part I would ask you to keep this form, as it has information of how to contact me. I will also ask you to sign a consent form, which lets other people know that you have agreed to take part in the study.

At any time you may decide that you no longer want to take part in the study, you do not need to give a reason why. If you decide you no longer want to take part all information that you have contributed will be removed from the study.

Consent forms

If you are under 16, I am required to get a your parents/guardian's consent. You will receive a consent form for your parent/guardian to complete, I will also give you an information sheet for them to read.

Confidentiality

All information you provide will be kept confidential and secure, in a locked cupboard. I will type out everything both you and I say during the interview, this will be given a number, so no-one will be able to tell it was you who said it. At the end of the study the tapes will be destroyed.

During our meeting everything you say will be kept confidential. I will discuss some of this information with my research supervisor, who you may also contact. The only time I will not keep your information confidential is if you reveal that you, or other people are in danger, or being hurt by another person. If this happens, I am required by law to pass on this information to another party.

What will happen to the information I provide?

The information you provide will be added to information provided by approximately 12 other young people. I will give each participant a number and everything you say will be

taped and then typed onto computer. The reason why you are given a number is so that anything you say cannot be traced back to you.

I will look at the information provided by all the participants. I am interested in common themes, that is things that you and other young people agree about.

The information you provide may be included in this study, nothing you say will have your name on it, no-one will know it was you who said it. Some of the information included in this study may then be used in other studies, this is important as it will help further research to be carried out investigating what it is like today to be a gay or lesbian adolescent.

All tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

What are the benefits of me taking part?

Quite often adolescents feel that they are not heard. This is especially true of gay and lesbian adolescents. It is hoped that this study will give you the chance to tell your story and let you discuss what it is like to be a gay or lesbian adolescent today.

The study is also important as you may help to educate professionals about what it is like to be a gay or lesbian adolescent and some of the challenges you may face.

What are the disadvantages of taking part?

You may find that talking about your experiences is difficult, it may even be upsetting. At the end of the interview there will be time to discuss issues, which may have been difficult for you. I will also stay after the interview for a short period of time to allow you to discuss anything or to answer any questions you may have. At the end of the interview I will give you a list of useful contacts, which may be helpful if you feel you would like further help. **If you continue to feel upset, or you are worried about your physical or mental health you should contact your GP (Doctor).**

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am carrying out the research as part of a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of Edinburgh. This research project was approved by the University of Edinburgh (Department of Clinical Psychology), and the Psychology Ethics Committee, who have not raised any objections as to the ethical validity of this study.

Thank you for taking time to read this. If you would like to ask me any further questions please contact me:

**Ian Connor
Trainee Clinical Psychologist
The University of Edinburgh
Level 4, Kennedy Tower
Royal Edinburgh Hospital
Morningside, EH10 5HF
0131 537 6280**

If you would like to discuss anything regarding this study, or any of the information contained within this information sheet with an Independent Advisor, please contact:

**Matthias Schwannauer
The University of Edinburgh
Level 7, Kennedy Tower
Royal Edinburgh Hospital
Morningside, EH10 5HF
0131 537 6280**

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



The Experience of Gay and Lesbian Adolescents

Name of Researcher:
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Fax 0131 537 6760

Please Tick

- | | YES | NO |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I have read and understand the information sheet. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I understand that some of the information I provide may be used in this and other studies. I am also aware that any such information will be anonymous, it will not contain my name. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree to take part in the above study. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Person taking consent
(if different from researcher)

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher

PARENT INFORMATION SHEET



Section of Clinical and Health Psychology
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or direct dial 0131 537

Fax 0131 537 6760

The Experience of Gay and Lesbian Adolescents.

I would like to invite your son/daughter to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether you consent to them taking part or not, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with your son/daughter. If there is anything you are unclear about, don't hesitate to contact me, my contact details are listed below. Please take time to decide if you consent to your son/daughter taking part in the research or not.

What is the study about?

The study is being carried out to increase understanding of the experience gay and lesbian adolescents face in growing-up. The study would also like to investigate potential difficulties gay and lesbian adolescents may face and how they cope with these difficulties.

What will your son/daughter be asked to do if they choose to take part?

Once consent has been established I will contact an LGBT Youth Worker. I will then arrange to meet your son/daughter, either individually, or as part of a group. The meeting will take the form of a semi-structured interview during which your son/daughter will be asked a number of questions, for example, "How do you get on with your family, or friends?" "Has it been difficult for others to accept that you may be gay or lesbian?" I anticipate that the meeting will last approximately one hour.

I would like to audiotape this meeting, just so I don't forget anything that is said. Information that your son/daughter provides may be included in this and other studies, such information, will of course, be anonymous.

Why has my son/daughter been asked to take part?

Your son/daughter has been asked to take part as they have attended an LGBT Youth Group. I am targeting individuals who have attended such groups as they fall within the

age range required by the study and they have self-identified as having same-sex attractions.

Does your son/daughter have to take part?

No, they do not have to take part, the choice is yours and theirs. If you do consent to your son/daughter participating in the study I would ask you to keep this form, as a point of reference and contact. I will also ask you to sign the accompanying consent form.

At any time you may withdraw your consent, and your son/daughter's participation in the study will come to an end. You may do this without explanation. Should you decide to withdraw consent all material that your son/daughter has contributed will be eliminated from the study.

Consent forms

Ethical Bodies require Parent/Guardian consent forms to be completed if a participant is underage. The consent form indicates that you and your son/daughter have read the information sheets and are consenting to take part in the study.

Confidentiality

All information provided will be kept confidential and secure, in a locked filing cabinet. To increase confidentiality, interviews will be transcribed and each transcription will be coded. At the end of the study the tapes will be destroyed.

Everything discussed during the interview will remain confidential, however, some information may be discussed with my research supervisor. Confidentiality may be broken if, during the interview, it becomes apparent that your son/daughter, or another person is in danger or are being hurt by another person. If this happens, I am required by law to pass on this information to another party.

What will happen to the information provided?

The current study is qualitative, that is, I am interested in the experience of gay and lesbian young people. As such, all information will be audio-taped and transcribed. The information your child provides will be analysed together with information provided by other young people. Common themes will be identified and these themes used as the basis to generate categories and ideas regarding the experience of gay and lesbian young people.

Information will remain anonymous, so your son/daughter can't be identified. In addition, some of the information included in this study may then be used in other studies, this is important as it will help to advance our understanding of the experience of gay and lesbian adolescents.

All tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

What are the benefits of your son/daughter taking part in this study?

Quite often adolescents feel that they are not heard. This is especially true of gay and lesbian adolescents. It is hoped that this study will give your son/daughter the opportunity to tell their story and provide an insight as to the experiences of gay and lesbian adolescents. The narrative experience gained from this study may also be used as a basis to educate professionals.

What are the disadvantages of taking part?

Your son/daughter may find that sharing their experiences is difficult, it may even be distressing. At the end of the interview there will be time to discuss issues, which may be difficult for your son/daughter. I will also stay after the interview for a short period of time for any further discussion, or to answer any questions. At the end of each interview I will provide your son/daughter with an information sheet, which lists some organisations they may contact should they feel they need to talk further. **If your son/daughter continues to feel upset, or you are worried about their physical or mental health you should contact their GP.**

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am carrying out the research as part of a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of Edinburgh. This research project was approved by the University of Edinburgh (Department of Clinical Psychology), and the Psychology Ethics Committee, who have not raised any objections as to the ethical validity of this study.

Thank you for taking time to read this. If you would like to ask me any further questions please contact me:

**Ian Connor
Trainee Clinical Psychologist
The University of Edinburgh
Level 4, Kennedy Tower
Royal Edinburgh Hospital
Edinburgh, EH10 5HF
0131 537 6280**

If you would like to discuss anything regarding this study, or any of the information contained within this information sheet with an Independent advisor please contact:

**Matthias Schwannauer, Clinical Psychologist
The University of Edinburgh
Royal Edinburgh Hospital
Edinburgh, EH10 5HF.
Tel: 0131 537 6280**

PARENT CONSENT FORM



The Experience of Gay and Lesbian Adolescents

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or direct dial 0131 537
Fax 0131 537 6760

Please tick

YES NO

1) I have read and understand the information sheet.

☐ ☐

2) I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

☐ ☐

3) I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/she is free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

☐ ☐

4) I understand that some of the information my son/daughter provides may be used in this study, in further studies, or may be used for teaching purposes. I am aware that this information will remain anonymous.

☐ ☐

5) I agree to allow my child to take part in the above study.

☐ ☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

POST-INTERVIEW ADVICE FORM

You may find that talking about your experiences have been difficult and they may even have been distressing. At the end of the interview there will be time to discuss issues, which may be difficult for you. I will also stay after the interview for a short period of time. **If you continue to feel upset, or you are worried about your physical or mental health you should contact your GP (Doctor).**

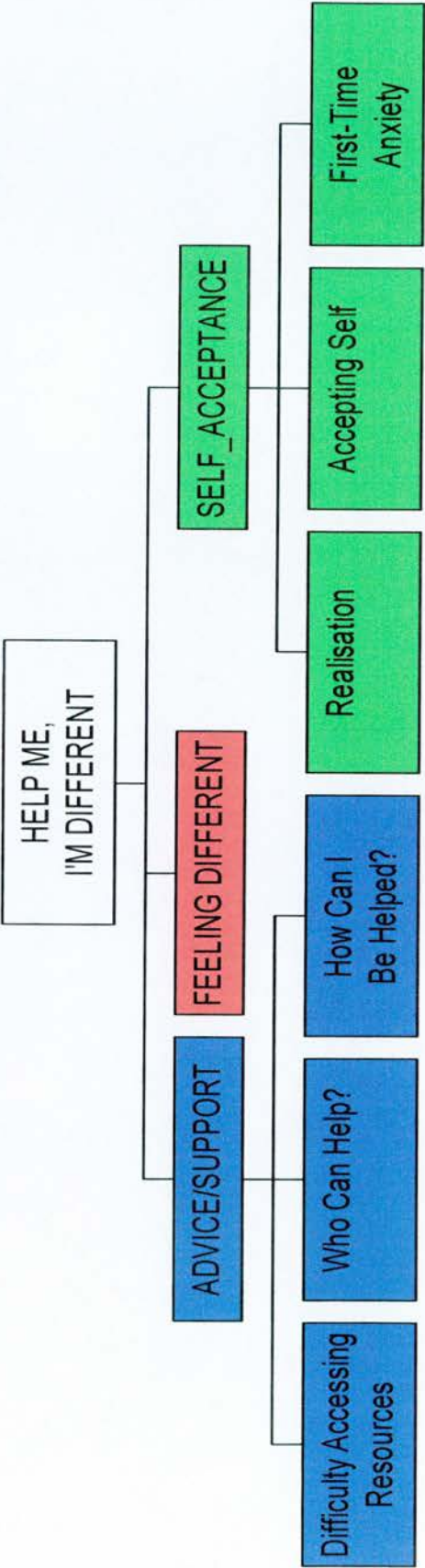
In addition you may also find help from:

- NHS Direct: <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>
- The Samaritans: 08457 90 90 90
- Childline: 0800 11 11
- If you are worried about your sexual health, contact the GUM (Genito-Urinary Medicine) Department at your local hospital, this is a confidential service.

APPENDIX III

OVERVIEW OF MAIN CATEGORY "HELP ME, I'M DIFFERENT"

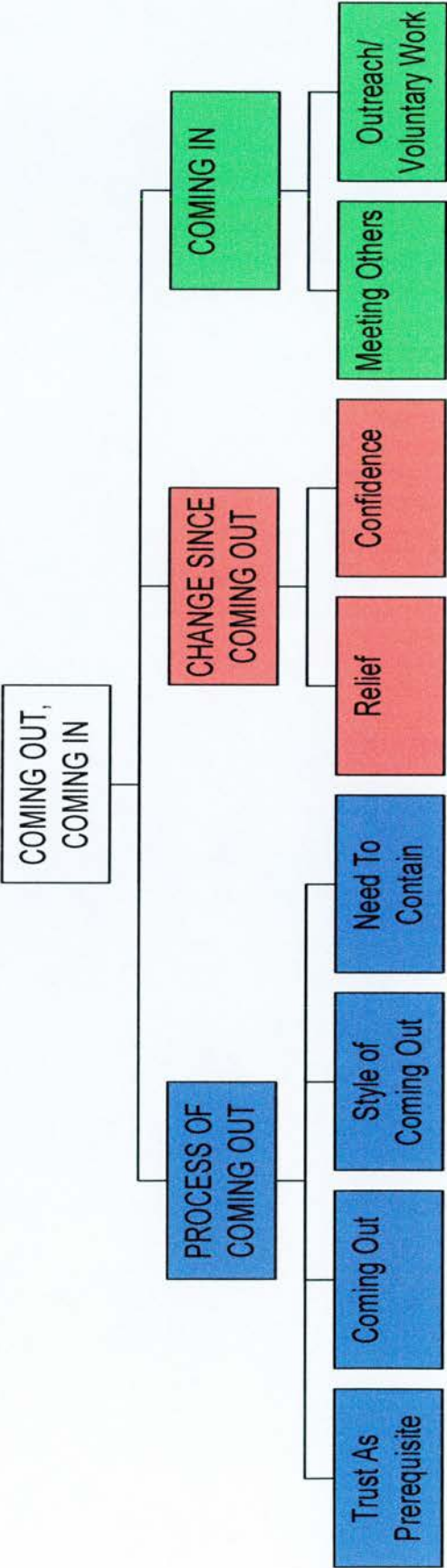
MAIN CATEGORY



APPENDIX IV

OVERVIEW OF MAIN CATEGORY "COMING OUT, COMING IN"

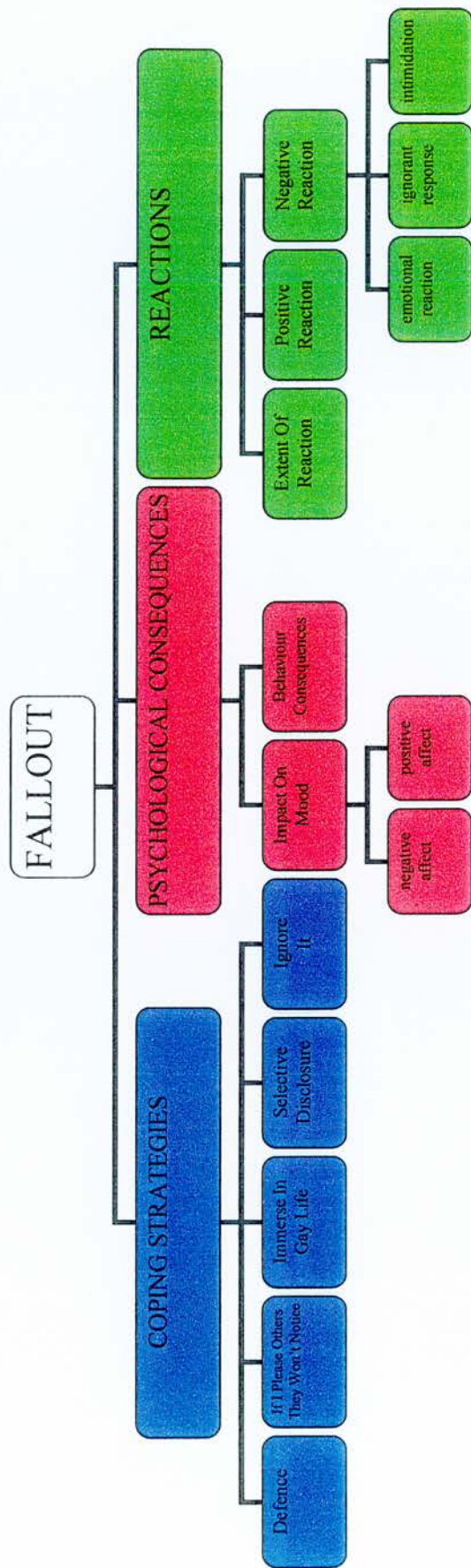
MAIN CATEGORY



APPENDIX V

OVERVIEW OF MAIN CATEGORY "FALLOUT"

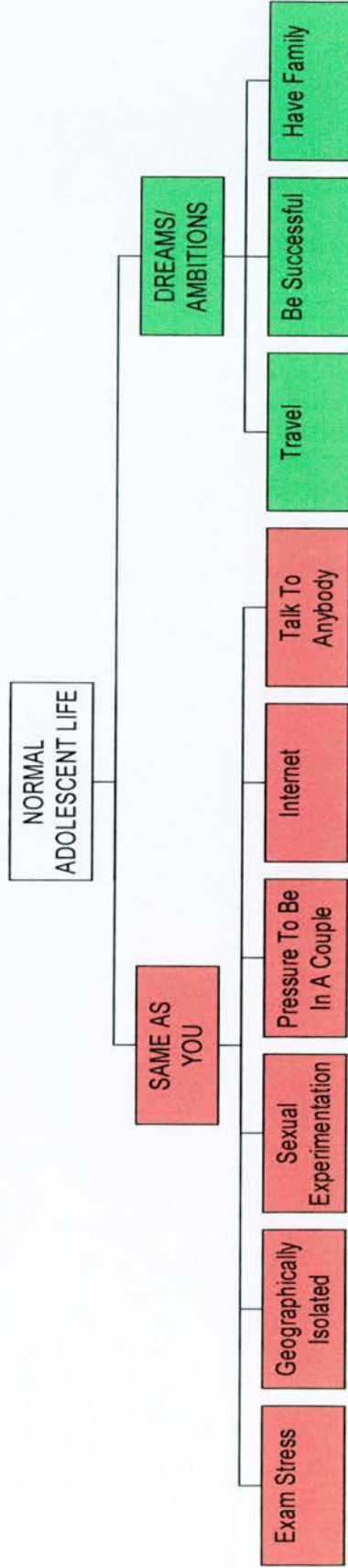
MAIN CATEGORY



APPENDIX VI

OVERVIEW OF MAIN CATEGORY "NORMAL ADOLESCENT LIFE"

MAIN CATEGORY



APPENDIX VII

EXAMPLES OF EXPLORATIVE LEVEL OF DATA ANALYSIS

Transcript 3 – Group Interview (3 male participants & 1 female participant)

Transcript 4 – Single Interview (male participant)

Transcript 5 – Single Interview (female participant)

Transcript 7 – Group Interview (2 female participants)

It's About Mair Than Who Uh Kiss

OK, you also said there that things have changed, ahm,
you're a lot happier, you've come out of your shell since
you came-out, so what were things like before?

6: Its like, things like, eh, jist bein able to talk to ma mah
aboot who ah fancy, and what uh've been doin the day, who
uh've bein goan ti see an, jist stuff like that, and how uh've
been feelin aboot things, and I used ti be closed up and too
scared ti speak, 'cos I used ti think I talked dead camp,
which, uh think uh still do. But ehm, jist think uh can be
mair maself.

being able to talk to mum
discuss who I fancy
what I've done today
who I've seen
how I feel about things
used to be 'closed up'
frightened to speak
thought I spoke camp
still speak camply
'more myself'

So a lot of the things you're saying there, I don't know if
you agree with this, you know, who you fancy, ahm, your
feelings, they're things that/

/6: You're not able to talk about. Aye, whereas before uh
wis, uh wis shut away, an there wis this gorgeous guy came
on the telly and uh wisnae allowed to say, phworr, look at
him {{interviewee laughs}} but na, it wis jist part of life, it
wis jist an everyday thing.

not able to talk about
before
shut away
gorgeous guy
tv.
wasn't allowed
phworr!
look at him
part of life
everyday thing

So you don't feel you have to hide things?

Nah, why shud uh?

no /disagreement
why should I?

Is there anyway in that people react to you differently
because you are gay, than another, one of your friends
that are straight?

7: No, because I mean the close friends that I keep, they,
those things have never happened, and if they don't, then I
refer to them as acquaintances.

disagreement
close friends
never happened
classify / refer
acquaintances

Ok, what about family?

7: Ahm, my father just gets on with it and my mum, my
mum doesn't know a lot about it, so she's curious and she
asks dad questions, but that's it, (OK)

father
gets on with it
mum
curious
ignorant
father
inquisitive

6: Ah, Ah've hud ma ups and doons, but it's changed for me
because I cun come oot ma shell mair, I cun be mair me,
you know what I mean? (Yeah) And ma family's awright
wi it, but the, sometimes ma auntie's fiance annoys me,
when 'e automatically assumes every gay guys disnae want
a good relationship and thuir jist wantin cock fun aw the
time, and a lot, I think, maybe straight people wull think that
about gay guys.

'ups and downs'
change
'out of shell'
'be more myself'
family accepting
auntie's fiance
annoyed
assumption
gay guys nor waiting relationship
gay guys want cock fun
straight peoples thought of
gay men.

So there's stereotypes there (Aye) that straight people
think about/

/Aye that gay guys only like, sleep around in toilets and aw
that, in ma opinion.

gay guys
promiscuous sex
sex in pubic toilets
personal opinion

Transcript 4 26/04/05 (Glasgow – Indiv Int)

What way would you say your sexuality has affected your life?

I don't know, eh, I kinda guess, delayed things, in the way that, I didn't actually come-out, even to myself, 'til I was about, kinda nineteen, so I kinda like, you know, I never had, I never went out with anybody until that age, I never even kissed anybody up until that age, ahm I was kinda very introverted, didn't, you know, talk to many people, have many friends really, so it was kinda like, I don't know, so a lot of my kinda experiences, a lot of my social experiences came after coming-out, kinda thing (OK), so it was like, I don't know. Eh, my parents, the reason, like, I didn't come-out for quite a long time was my parents are dead religious, so I was like, kinda dead scared (OK), coming-out in that sense and, it's like {{interviewee sniggers}} the first thing I did was kinda move out into the student halls as soon as possible, 'cos like, you know, I didn't want to, I wanted to do stuff but not have my parents know about it, kinda thing (absolutely, sure), at that stage, so it was fine.

So you'd there that you were quite introverted, do you think that was because of your sexuality, or do you think you would have been an introverted person if you had been straight?

don't know
I guess
delayed things / life
didn't come out
no self acknowledgement
nineteen years old
no relationships
never kissed anyone
very introverted
didn't talk to many people
not many friends
had most social experiences after
coming out.

parents are the reason I didn't
come out
parents are religious
frightened of coming out

move into student halls
asap
wanted to do stuff
not have parents find out

It's About Mair Than Who Uh Kiss

Ahm, well, I, you know, I was introvert when I was younger and it's just like, I don't know, I, by kinda socialising more you kinda come out of your shell (**yeah**), I, become a bit more extravert, 'cos you know we are social beings afterall (**uh-huh**). Amh, but, I don't know, I was, I was very, quiet as a kid, you know, I got bullied quite a bit at primary school, but its like.

Introvert
when younger
unsure
socialising more
'out of shell'
more extravert
social beings
unsure
quiet as kid
bullied a lot
primary school

Why was that, so you know?

I have no idea, {{interviewee laughs}}, this was like in Cornwall, when I used to live down there (**right**) and it's like, there's this kid, who was like the tallest in the class and he was the most popular, I don't know if that's the reason, ahm, so he decided he didn't like me, so he just kinda got everyone to isolate me and not, you know, kinda get on everybody's back if they tried to come anywhere near me.

no idea
Cornwall
used to live there
tallest in class
most popular
didn't like me
isolated
prevent others from befriending me

Was there something that set you apart from the other children?

I don't know, like when I was down in Cornwall I had the same accent as everybody else, but it's kinda, when it comes to Scotland everybody just found it kinda very interesting, you know, ahm, and my accent didn't change to Scottish when I moved up here, kinda just, I don't know, it's kinda weird, it just sorta blended, so people think I'm American

unsure
Cornwall
same accent
Scotland
very interesting
accent not changed
blended
American

9: I suppose it's something that would interest me, and if I didn't get into that I suppose I would go into domestic violence.

Suppose
interest me
if I didn't get into it
domestic violence

Int: How do you feel that people in the police force would respond to you?

9: Things are changing, a lot more officers are coming out, and come on, there are so many bent coppers in the police force, that aren't gay, so they can get away with what they do and I can get away with what I do (**Int:** uh-huh), the thing is what I'm doing isn't always wrong. It only takes, it does only take one person to make a difference, they may not be heard, but it only takes one person to change another person's life, as I said, it can build up to something big.

changing
more gay police officers
bent coppers
get away with what they do
I can get away with what I do
one person makes a difference
may not be heard
one person to change another
person's life.
something big

Int: What has coming to this group given you?

9: It's given me a stable network of close friends.

stable network
close friends

Int: Is that something that you didn't have before you came here?

9: No, I had a close network, like of friends but they were mostly straight. It's not that I can't relate to ma friends that are straight, I can totally relate to ma friends that are straight and things like that, because there were days that I claimed that I was straight, but I can relate to gay people, sometimes better, sometimes not. I suppose

pre-existing network close friends
friends mostly straight
can relate to straight
friends
once claimed to be straight
relate to gay people better

it's one thing out the window that you don't have to discuss with them.

common ground
don't have to discuss

Int: Some of the people I have already interviewed seem to join LGBT Youth Groups for social contact, a lot of them feel quite isolated/

9: / Do they mean they feel isolated from people or from the LGBT community?

clarification

Int: What do you think?

9: I'm thinking they feel isolated from the LGBT community, not from people (**Int:** OK), not like other friends, I'm sure they all have a network of other friends, but I never felt like, I know I never felt like that because I came to the actual centre, before the Youth Group, therefore I had gay friends through the centre, it wasn't that I didn't feel I had friends and by going out, I went to an alternative, like nightclub, like I went to the Cathouse and things like that, where there are a lot more people who claim that they are gay, bisexual, whatever, and you do meet a few genuinely gay people through going out as well, I met people through that, not through this, I've just met more people through this.

isolated from LGBT community
not isolated from people
have network of friends
never felt isolated from LGBT community

Came to LGBT centre before Youth Group
had gay friends
alternative nightclub

more LGBT people there

met other gay folk

met gay people by going out,
not through youth group.

Int: Another thing that was coming up was that a lot of people were having problems feeling down, have you ever felt like that?

It's About Mair Than Who Uh Kiss

Int: So what about that, ahm, you had said that you just didn't know what to do, no information and no education, was that similar for you at school?

12: Yeah, I think that the only mention of homosexuality at school, ever, was in Religious Studies, when they talked about who the Nazis persecuted, and I was like, ooh homosexuals, I think maybe that it was mentioned really, really briefly in Social and Sex Education, but it was like, it was just like this passing comment and everyone sniggered. It was just like there were two worlds and I knew there must be gay people out there, and like my parents had gay friends when I was younger and stuff like that/

little discussion of homosexuality at school

Religious studies

Nazi persecution of homosexuals

ooh - emphatic

mentioned briefly

Social and Sex Education

passing comment

everyone sniggered

two worlds

must be other gays

parents had gay friends

Int: / did you realise at the time?

12: Well I remember seeing like, two of the snogging and being like huh, but it just seems like, I don't know, it's just like two different lives, I don't know, it just didn't seem real and it was like trying to bring those two worlds together and that was the hard point, but its easier when you get through that.

recall

2 snogging

2 different lives

unreal

trying to bring two worlds together

hard point

does get easier.

Int: What was sex education like for you #11?

11: Well we had one lesson anyway {{interviewee sniggers}}, so any sex education would have done. We had a couple of gay teachers, like female teachers that I knew

one lesson

no sex education

couple gay teachers

female teachers

It's About Mair Than Who Uh Kiss

about, and I knew that a couple of things happened to them,
like their cars got egged and stuff, but I mean that probably
happened to quite a few of the teachers/

vandalism
homophobic attacks???

12: Were they together?

11: No, separate, I mean one of them gave us the sex
education lesson but she was talking about, "oh, yeah, when
I was married" and things and everyone was like "what,
what?" But she didn't go into the gay side of things at all, I
guess with Section 28, you're not allowed to. She's since,
after I left, put a poster up promoting a gay dance group,
she's a theatre teacher, there was a lot of trouble over that,
some kid ended up making a comment and basically she
ended up leaving the school, 'cos the staff wouldn't back
her up and stuff. I mean there was a couple of girls that
used to wind up the bullies because they'd be like "ah, gay!"
and they'd be like, "yes we are," and link hands and stuff,
that was about all, there was a really camp guy and he just
got bullied lots (12: uh-huh) and that was all that there was
about gay, just bullying.

Sex education lesson

ignored gay issues
Section 28
not allowed to discuss gay
issues
promote gay dance group
trouble
remarks made
leaving school/job
not backed-up.

bullies
girls holding hands
camp guy
bullied a lot
gay meant being bullied

Int: Was bullying something that you guys experienced?

12: Ahm, I, I didn't really get bullied, ahm, I was always,
like I was really sporty and I've always been kinda like
really strong, I guess and people would sorta call me a man,
I do, I can remember like one guy calling me a lesbian, but

not bullied
sporty
strong
called a man
called a lesbian